

THE MUSLIMS OF SRI LANKA

ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF ETHNIC HARMONY

900 – 1915

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FOREWORD

I am happy that I persuaded Dr. Lorna Dewaraja to undertake this study.

In the first instance, I should congratulate Dr. Dewaraja on her work for not only has she brought to bear on the study undoubted scholarship, but has also approached the subject with understanding.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka: One Thousand Years of Ethnic Harmony: 900-1915 is a pioneering work in the sense that it is the first study, according to my knowledge, exclusively devoted to the history of Muslims of the old Kandyan kingdom. No doubt, it fulfils a long-felt need and helps to bridge certain areas which have not been researched in detail.

Dr. Dewaraja who is the author of a number of valuable books is eminently qualified to undertake this task. She is historian of repute and recognition and with her in-depth knowledge of the Kandyan period, we are fortunate that this study was undertaken by her.

She has done extensive research and field work. Her style is simple and flows beautifully keeping the reader absorbed. To say in a nutshell, this piece of work digs into the roots of the Muslims of Sri Lanka. It is a well-known fact that their beginning go back to distant centuries, even if one is to prune the observations of Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike that "the Ceylon Moors have been in Ceylon as long as we, the Sinhalese, have been here". The people must have the knowledge of their past and it is said if they have a past must not try to ignore it.

It has been rightly said that people move forward with their history on their back. Conversely, a people cannot fully play their role as citizens of their country without a clear grasp of their heritage. Moreover, it is a verdict of history that people who have no knowledge of their past cannot have a future.

The interest a people show in their history is a natural and welcome phenomenon. However, there are certain pitfalls in this exercise in a multi-ethnic society such as ours. The historian should be motivated by a commitment to truth, and interpret history so that negative aspects do not get over-emphasised, and positive aspects receive sufficient projection. Mercifully, the positive aspect is predominant in the Muslim role in our history.

E H Carr writes: “The facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like on the fishmonger’s slab. The historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style appeals to him”. He also observes: “it used to be said that facts speak for themselves”. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them. It is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello’s characters who said that a fact is like a sack-it won’t stand up till you have put something in it”.

Dr. Dewaraja points out that “historians have traditionally been attracted by wars and rebellions whereas the peaceful co-existence of groups of people over long periods tends to be overlooked. She adds: “In the history of Sri Lanka few are aware of the harmonious relationship which had developed between the Sinhalese, its indigenous inhabitants, and the Muslims who initially were foreigners, and that both have lived together peacefully for over a thousand years. Perhaps because it was such a peaceful relationship, it has passed unnoticed by the historian.”

Analysing the writing of history in India, Romila Thapar has deplored contemporary ideology intruding into the interpretation of history. It is the duty of the historian to avoid “giving the floor” to conflicts, to the exclusion of, what I would call “confluence”.

Unlike in India where Islam made its entry as a conquering proselytizing force, in Sri Lanka it appeared as the personal faith of a peaceful trading people who in course of time earned the goodwill, confidence and trust of the indigenous people. Buddhist ideals of tolerance and accommodation too were contributory factors. Besides, there was hardly any economic factor that could have caused conflict. Therefore, Muslim integration into Sinhala society proceeded at an even pace for which there are few parallels elsewhere in the world.

I am confident that Dr. Dewaraja’s work will make a substantial contribution to Sinhala-Muslim understanding immensely, vital today to confront new and complex problems.

A C S Hameed, M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs

FROM THE PUBLISHER

The Lanka Islamic Foundation takes pleasure in presenting this work by Dr. Lorna Dewaraja.

The Sinhalese possess their Mahavamsa, the Culavamsa and the Rajavaliya and the Tamils their Yalpanavaipavamalai. The Muslims of Sri Lanka have no chronicle of their own and are without a historical tradition. This is a serious lacuna which has to be filled, in the interests of the Muslim people and of the country.

Ours is only a modest effort in the enterprise of recording a part of the history of the Muslim people. It is encouraging to note that several attempts have been made in this direction. Sri Lankans on the whole have to be made known of the history of the Sri Lankan Muslims. That would, it is our view, greatly promote harmony and understanding.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not place on record the valuable contribution made by the late A.A.Latiff. His experience and knowledge have contributed in no small measure towards Dr. Dewaraja's efforts.

We do hope this work will be a modest contribution to the promotion of goodwill and amity among the people of Sri Lanka.

A.C.A.M.Nuhuman.
President
The Lanka Islamic Foundation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was undertaken at the request of Honourable A.C.S. Hameed, Sri Lanka's Minister of Foreign Affairs who has been a member of the country's Legislature for a continuous period of thirty four years and is the most senior parliamentarian in the Government Group. The cordial relationship between the Sinhalese, the majority community and the Muslim minority which is the theme of this work is typified in the career of the Honourable Minister who has the unique achievement of being returned repeatedly by a constituency in which the Muslims are only seventeen percent of the electorate. This is a demonstration and an affirmation of the state of amity which has prevailed between the two communities for a thousand years and the details of which will be highlighted in the following pages. The author acknowledges a deep debt of gratitude to Honourable A.C.S. Hameed without whose initiative and encouragement this work would not have seen the light of day.

Among those who helped the author special mention must be of the late Mr. A.A.Latif who showed a deep interest in this research and gave valuable advice while the work was in progress although he did not live to see its completion.

A special word of thanks is due to Dr.V.L.B.Mendis who read through the final drafts and suggested many improvements.

The author expresses her sincere thanks to all those who helped her in the field research and who are far too numerous to be mentioned by name. They include the Mahanayake of the Malwatta Chapter and many other leading bhikkhus in the Kandyan areas, Muslim dignitaries in charge of mosques, Muslim religious teachers and physicians and several villagers, both Muslim and Buddhist. The interviews conducted in very remote villages were very enjoyable and productive and proved beyond doubt the author's thesis that in the less urbanised, less commercialised and less politicised sectors of Sri Lankan society there was much more good will among the racial and religious groups than elsewhere.

Lorna Dewaraja
June 1994

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Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|---|
| BM | British Museum |
| CHJ | Ceylon Historical Journal |
| JRASCB | Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society Ceylon Branch |
| MICH | Moors Islamic Cultural Home |
| SLNA | Sri Lanka National Archives |
| STR | Service Tenure Register |
| UHC | University of Ceylon History of Ceylon |

Percentage Distribution of Population of Sri Lanka by Districts and Race

Census 1981

Table 20

| Country and Kandyan District | All Races | Sinhalese Low Country & Kandyan | Ceylon Tamils | Indian Tamils | Ceylon Moors | Burghers | Malays |
|--|--------------|--|------------------|------------------|-----------------|----------|--------|
| Sri Lanka | 100.0 | 74.0 | 12.7 | 5.5 | 7.1 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Colombo | 100.0 | 77.6 | 10.0 | 1.2 | 8.3 | 1.2 | 0.3 |
| Gampaha | 100.0 | 92.0 | 3.5 | 0.4 | 2.7 | 0.6 | 0.6 |
| Kalutara | 100.0 | 87.2 | 1.2 | 4.1 | 7.4 | 0.1 | 0.1 |
| Kandy | 100.0 | 74.3 | 5.0 | 9.4 | 10.5 | 0.2 | 0.3 |
| Matale | 100.0 | 79.9 | 5.8 | 7.0 | 7.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Nuwara-Eliya | 100.0 | 42.1 | 12.7 | 42.7 | 2.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Galle | 100.0 | 94.5 | 0.9 | 1.4 | 3.2 | -- | -- |
| Matara | 100.0 | 94.5 | 0.7 | 2.2 | 2.5 | -- | -- |
| Hambantota | 100.0 | 97.1 | 0.6 | 0.1 | 1.2 | -- | 1.0 |
| Jaffna | 100.0 | 0.8 | 95.2 | 2.4 | 1.6 | -- | -- |
| Mannar | 100.0 | 8.2 | 51.3 | 13.0 | 26.1 | -- | -- |
| Vavuniya | 100.0 | 16.6 | 56.3 | 19.6 | 6.8 | -- | -- |
| Maullaitivu | 100.0 | 5.2 | 75.4 | 14.5 | 4.7 | 0.1 | -- |
| Batticaloa | 100.0 | 3.4 | 70.8 | 1.2 | 23.9 | 0.7 | -- |
| Amparai | 100.0 | 37.8 | 20.0 | 0.4 | 41.5 | 0.2 | -- |
| Trincomalee | 100.0 | 33.4 | 34.3 | 2.1 | 29.3 | 0.5 | 0.3 |
| Kurunegala | 100.0 | 92.9 | 1.2 | 0.5 | 5.0 | -- | 0.1 |
| Puttalam | 100.0 | 82.6 | 6.6 | 0.5 | 9.9 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Anuradhapura | 100.0 | 91.1 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 7.1 | -- | 0.1 |
| Polonnaruwa | 100.0 | 91.4 | 2.0 | -- | 6.4 | -- | -- |
| Badulla | 100.0 | 69.1 | 5.9 | 20.2 | 4.2 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Monaragala | 100.0 | 92.7 | 2.0 | 3.2 | 1.9 | -- | 0.1 |
| Ratnapura | 100.0 | 85.0 | 2.4 | 10.6 | 1.7 | -- | 0.1 |
| Kegalla | 100.0 | 85.9 | 2.2 | 6.7 | 5.0 | -- | -- |

I. INTRODUCTION

“The present age is the most historical minded of all ages. Modern man is to an unprecedented degree self conscious and therefore conscious of history. He peers eagerly back into the twilight out of which he has come, in the hope that its faint beams will illuminate the obscurity into which he is going; and conversely his aspirations and anxieties about the path that lies ahead quicken his insight into what is behind. Past, present and future is linked together in the endless chain of history.”

E.H.Carr ¹

History is said to be a little more than a record of the crimes, follies and misfortunes of humanity and historians have traditionally been attracted by wars and rebellions whereas the peaceful co-existence of groups of people over long periods tends to be overlooked. Hence history deals more with the arts of war and much less with the arts of peace. In the history of Sri Lanka few are aware of the harmonious relationship which has developed between the Sinhalese its indigenous inhabitants and the Muslims who initially were foreigners, and that have lived together peacefully for over a thousand years. Perhaps because it was such a peaceful relationship, it has passed unnoticed by the historian.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka form the second largest minority in the island next to the Tamils and constitute seven percent of the island's population, numbering over one million people. As is evident from the statistics given below from the Census Report of 1981, the Muslims are spread out in all the twenty four districts of the island but in none of them do they constitute majority. There is a heavy concentration of Muslims in the three districts of Batticaloa, Amparai and Trincomalee which together comprise the Eastern Province.

The Muslims of Sri Lanka had till very recently achieved complete political integration with the majority community in the sense that the Muslims, had no Muslim political party based on linguistic or religious issues nominating their candidates for parliamentary seats. Instead Muslims are represented and have risen to pre-eminence in all the major political parties in the island. Muslims have been voted to power from electorates with an overwhelmingly high Sinhala population even when the opposing candidate happens to be a Sinhalese. A noteworthy example is the Honourable Mr. A.C.S. Hameed, Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister who has been returned to Parliament at six successive elections from the same constituency, the Muslim population of which constitutes only seventeen percent. The Honourable Mr.M.H. Mohamed, the speaker of the Parliament and Mr.M.L.M. Aboosally, Minister of Labour and Vocational Training are two other Muslim representatives who were elected to hold office from predominantly Sinhala electorates.²

The situation changed recently as there has been an attempt from time to time to establish a separate Muslim political identity. The aspirations of a new generation of educated Muslims and the pressure of international currents of opinion were factors which contributed towards this claim. Another factor which heightened Muslim consciousness was the Sinhala-Tamil conflict that plagued the island during the last ten years. On many occasions Muslims and specially those in the Eastern Province became targets of attack for one reason or other. Certain sectors of Muslims feared that in the settlement of the Sinhala-Tamil conflict Muslim interests will be overlooked, specially because the Eastern Province, the population of which is one third Muslim, had increasingly become vital to a negotiated settlement of the ethnic problem. As a result the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress was formed and its future direction and influence on Muslim politics is left to be seen. The creation of a new political party reflecting a consciousness of a Muslim ethno-religious identity over the past few years does not in any way suggest any separatist tendencies on their part.

On 29 July 1987, the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord was signed by the two heads of State of India and Sri Lanka and this was expected to end the ethnic war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil separatist groups and usher in a precarious peace. It was agreed that the Northern and Eastern Provinces of the island will form one administrative unit having one elected Provincial Council. It was also agreed that a referendum will be held before the end of 1988 so that the people of the Eastern Province will decide whether the Eastern Province will remain linked to the Northern Province as one unit or whether it should constitute a separate administrative unit having its own Provincial Council. As a result the Muslim community has become the focus of attention. The ethnic ratio of the Eastern Province is approximately as follows. Tamils 42 percent, Muslims thirty two percent and Sinhalese, twenty six percent. It is taken for granted that when the referendum is held, most if not all the Tamils will vote for a merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces so as to form a single contiguous Tamil speaking region extending from the North of the island to the South. The Sinhalese everywhere vehemently oppose this idea of a separate linguistic stretch on the ground that it may prove to be a potential threat to the territorial integrity of the island. It is clear that when the referendum is held it will be the Eastern province Muslims who would decide the crucial issue, whether the merger remains or dissolves. The Muslims being Tamil speakers, the claim for a separate linguistic region in the North and East is strengthened. The Tamils consider the Muslims as their “linguistic brethren” who should toe the line with them on vital issues. However, the Muslims who have maintained their identity for over a thousand years asserting their individuality on the basis of religion and not language are diametrically opposed to assimilation with the Tamil community. Hence the Muslims are faced with an identity crisis, the beginnings of which could be traced back to a hundred years, ever since Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan classed them as “Tamil converts to Islam”. A process of Islamisation then began, which was intensified during recent

years due to global trends and more so due to the complexities and uncertainties of the current domestic situation.

However, it is not the author's purpose to deal with contemporary politics of the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. Nor does this book claim to be a comprehensive history of the Sri Lankan Muslim community as it does not cover sections of the Muslim population like Malays, Memons, Borahs and Afghans. It is instead an objective and dispassionate analysis in a spirit of inquiry of the historical circumstances, the social process and the political and economic pressures through which a group of itinerant traders, initially foreign in race, religion and culture became an indispensable and integral part of Sri Lankan society. This wholesome relationship developed over a period of thousand years, that is, from the time of Sri Lanka's first known contacts with the Islamic world, approximately in the eighth and ninth centuries till and ninth centuries till the beginnings of British rule. So complete was this integration that Reverend James Cordiner, a keen and intelligent observer and a graduate of the Aberdeen University, who stayed five years in the country from 1799-1804 keeping careful notes of what he heard and saw refers to the Muslims in this manner, "The Singhalese who profess the religion of Mohamed appear to be a mixed race, the principal of whose progenitors had emigrated from the peninsula of India. They are a much more active and industrious body of people than either the Christians or the followers of Buddha." ³

In Chapter II entitled "Merchants and Pilgrims" the author tries to trace the gradual evolution of a mutually beneficial relationship between the migrant Muslim traders and the agricultural Sinhalese from 900-1500 A.D. During this period which saw the foundation of racial and religious amity, the Muslims were economically and politically assets to the Sinhala monarchs, who in turn provided protection and gave permission for the traders to settle down in the Kingdom. The end of this period marks the zenith of Muslim commercial prosperity in Sri Lanka as well as in the rest of the Eastern seas.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Muslim community in Sri Lanka appeared so prosperous that Emerson Tennent suspected that had it not been for the timely appearance of a Christian power in the island, Sri Lanka instead of being a possession of the British Crown might have been a Mohammedan kingdom under the rule of some Arab adventurer.⁴ Tennent's assumption, however, was not based on factors, for Islamic militarism had in India reached its high water mark under the Khaljis and Tuqluks and by the beginning of the sixteenth century the vigour of the onslaught had died down and posed no threat to Sri Lanka. The Dutch too put forward a threat of a Muslim invasion of Sri Lanka merely to upset the Sinhala-Muslim alliance.⁵ At the time when the victorious Moghul armies under Aurangzeb (1658-1707) were penetrating into South India, rumours were spread around that soon Sri Lanka would be engulfed in the mighty Moghul empire and that the Muslim traders in the island were waiting to join hands with their co-religionists. This too was merely malicious gossip for by the time that Aurangzeb's southern campaigns began, disintegration and decline had already set within the empire. Chapter III entitled, "The Cross meets the Crescent", deals with support given by the Muslims to Sinhala Kings of Kotte and Sitavaka to check the European onslaught and the reverses suffered by the Muslims at the hands of the Christian powers. When the Portuguese first appeared off the shores of Sri Lanka, the Muslims who were well aware of Portuguese intentions warned the king, the Sangha, the nobles and the people of the potential threat to the country, sovereignty and to the national religion. When the Portuguese tried to gain a foothold in Colombo, the Muslims provided firearms, fought side by side with the Sinhalese and even used their influence with South Indian powers to get military assistance to the Sinhalese rulers in their effort to oust the intruder. Through the intervention of the Muslims, the Zamorin of Calicut sent three distinguished Moors of Cochin with forces to help Mayadunne (1521-1581), King of Sitavaka. The support given to the enemy intensified the hatred that the Christian powers bore towards the 'accursed Saracen', and the bitter rivalries prevalent in Europe were rigorously pursued. Unable to withstand Portuguese and

Dutch persecution the Muslims penetrated into the interior and it was at this stage that the indigenisation of the Muslims commenced.

Chapter IV deals with the process of structural assimilation of the Muslims into the Kandyan body politic. This process differs from cultural assimilation where the migrant culture is totally submerged in the host culture. The Muslims in the Kandyan kingdom remained a distinct and cohesive group, devoutly adhering to Islam and all its cultural attributes, but, were as a group assimilated into Kandyan society. A study of Muslim minorities in a few other Asian countries like Thailand, Burma and China shows that wherever Muslim trading colonies developed into permanent settlements they were subjected to two pressures diametrically opposed to each other:- a gravitational pull towards the Islamic core in order to preserve their Islamic identity and a similar pull in the opposite direction in an effort to integrate with the rest of the society as a means of survival in a foreign and sometimes hostile climate. In certain Asian situations the Muslims had to camouflage their culture from hostile eyes and remain Muslims indoors and play the semblance of being something else outdoors. These opposing forces have in many instances led to psychological stress, social unrest and sometimes even open rupture.

In Sri Lanka the Muslims did not undergo such a traumatic experience and they were able to maintain a delicate balance between the two contradictory forces thus preserving an unbroken record of peaceful co-existence with their neighbours. This was achieved in Sri Lanka with the least tension. The Islamic identity was maintained due to the spirit of religious tolerance prevailing in the country, which not only allowed but even encouraged the Muslims to strengthen their internal organisation while the integration into Kandyan society was possible due no doubt to the flexibility of Kandyan institutions as well as the adaptability of the Muslims and their willingness to conform and compromise in so far as their religious susceptibilities were not endangered. For instance the Muslims served as officials in the administration of the state as well as of the Buddhist monasteries. It is noteworthy that the

Muslims were functionaries in the Temple of the Tooth and participated in the ritual of the Asala Maha Perahera, the greatest pageant in the Buddhist world.⁶ This process of structural assimilation which took place without any erosion of the cultural distinctiveness of the Muslims is perhaps unique in minority-majority relations.

It is generally believed that the Muslims were only traders and had no other skills or interests. For instance Emerson Tennent writes “these immigrant traders became traders in all the products of the island, and the brokers through whose hands they passed in exchange for the wares of foreign countries. At no period were they either manufacturers, or producers in any department; their genius was purely commercial, and their attention was exclusively devoted to buying and selling what had been previously produced by the industry and ingenuity of others. They were dealers in jewelry, connoisseurs in gems, and collectors of pearls; and whilst the contented and apathetic Sinhalese in the villages and forests of the interior passed their lives in the cultivation of their rice lands, and sought no other excitement than the pomp and ceremonial of their temples the busy and ambitious Mohammedans on the coast built their warehouses at the ports, crowded the harbours with their shipping, and collected the wealth and luxuries of the island, its precious stones, its dyewoods, its spices and ivory, to be forwarded to China and the Persian Gulf”.⁷ Chapter V which deals with contributions to society will show that this is only a part of the truth and that the Muslims introduced to the island and practiced various skills specially those which were lacking in the country, thus supplementing the needs of a peasant society.

It is clear from the evidence at our disposal that right through out from the Anuradhapura period to Kandyan times there was a Muslim lobby operating in the Sri Lanka court. It was responsible for persuading the king to take action not only regarding matters of religious and cultural interest to the Islamic community but also advised the king on overseas trade policies. Above all the Muslims kept the country informed of developments abroad. The latter role became a vital one during

the last days of Kandy where the Hollander isolated the kingdom by controlling all communications with foreign powers. Hence the Muslims trader with his navigational skills and overseas contacts became the secret channel of communication between the court and the outside world.

It follows that the Muslims played a significant role in the foreign relations of Sri Lanka. As early as the thirteenth century Al-Haj-Abu-Uthman was sent by the Sinhala King to the Mamluk court of Egypt to negotiate direct trade relations between the two countries. The mission was very likely undertaken as a result of pressure brought by the Arab lobby in the court. It will be seen that Muslims were sent on important and confidential missions to South India right up to Kandyan times. The Muslims of Sri Lanka spoke Tamil and other South Indian languages and some of them even spoke Portuguese. Their linguistic fluency, international links and the internationalism of the Islamic faith, had made the Muslims particularly adroit at diplomacy. There are a few Muslim families in the Kandyan areas today who have the family name, Tanapatilagegedara (literally, belonging to the house of the ambassador). Since these family names often indicate profession and official status, it is possible that one of their ancestors served as an ambassador. It could be said therefore that the appointment of Mr. A.C.S. Hameed as the first Sri Lankan Foreign Minister to hold the separate portfolio of Foreign Affairs which until then had been under the Prime Minister was in keeping with this tradition.

In Thailand and Burma where there are sizeable Muslim minorities, the Muslims have been employed at various levels in diplomatic dealing. The Thai rulers of Ayutthaya sent Muslims as envoys. In Burma the Persian language was used for diplomatic purposes and here too the linguistic fluency of the Muslims became an asset. Muslims versed in Persian were stationed in principal cities to deal with foreigners and Muslim interpreters accompanied Burmese delegations on visits to neighbouring countries. It is said that king Bagyidaw who was dethroned after the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-28), sent a

Muslim emissary to the British to ask for help in regaining his throne.⁸

The long and close association between the Sinhalese and the Muslims continued till the British occupation of the maritime provinces in 1796 and the whole island in 1815. British rule was a masterly manipulation of the various elements in society. The policy of divide and rule, the changes introduced in the name of modernisation and progress, the plantation of cash crops, the monetisation of the economy and the consequent emergence of an entrepreneur class, the money lender and the boutique keeper, created a spirit of fierce competition where there had been co-operation. It is against this background that the first serious riots between the Sinhalese and the Muslims sparked off in 1915. Chapter VI tries to analyse the causes of this outbreak. Although the ostensible reason was a religious provocation, it was not a confrontation between Islam and Buddhism as is generally argued. It was a reflection of the political and economic tension caused by the rapid socio economic changes after 1815 and the consequent de-stabilisation of a traditional society, disrupting its components that for centuries had been harmoniously welded into a well integrated system.

It is relevant for this study to compare the position of Muslims of Sri Lanka with that of Muslim minorities in other countries in Asia. The most appropriate would be Thailand and Burma, the only countries other than Sri Lanka where Theravada Buddhists are in the majority. The Muslims are the largest minority group in the kingdom of Thailand representing five to eight percent of the population. They are divided into two groups, Thai Muslims and Malay Muslims. The former have to a high degree acculturated into the Thai Buddhist environment except for the fact that they remain Muslims. The Malay Muslims inhabit the three southern most provinces of Pattani, Yala, Narathivat and parts of Songkla; they speak Malay and there is a serious threat of Malay-Muslim separatism.

The difference in attitude between the Thai Muslims and the Malay Muslims is a by-product of history. As in Sri Lanka, Islam had a remarkable tradition of co-existence with the Thai Buddhism at all levels and for many centuries. At least from the sixteenth century when Muslims became commercially dominant in the Asian region, Muslims were employed by the Thai rulers of Ayutthaya as advisors, administrators, diplomats, King's merchants, soldiers and sailors. It is interesting to note that in the Kandyan kingdom too Muslims were employed in similar positions. They were accorded complete freedom of religious practice. In fact Islam was even given royal patronage by the Ayutthaya rulers.⁹ As in Sri Lanka State funds were allocated for the construction of mosques and the conduct of the Muslim festivities.

Ayutthaya's Malay Muslim vassals in the south particularly the Sultanate of Pattani had in the seventeenth century enjoyed a high degree of independence. After the shift of the capital to Bangkok in the last eighteenth century the grip over the southern Muslim provinces tightened. With the threat of Western colonial expansion all around, Bangkok embarked on a policy of territorial consolidation at the expense of the hitherto loosely affiliated Malay Muslim vassals of the south. In 1902, the Malay rulers of Pattani, were deposed by the Thai government despite strong protests by them. Continuous rebellion and resistance followed. The Islamic faith, the Malay identity, the memory of oppression and resistance, geo-political concentration, cross border linkages and kinship affiliations with Malaysia and resurgence of Islam at a global level have resulted in separatist tendencies. As far as the Muslims are concerned such a situation has not arisen in Sri Lanka because the historical and geo-political factors are totally different.

The Thai Muslims on the other hand have assimilated the host culture much more than the Sri Lankan Muslims, for the former speak Thai, have Thai names, wear Thai dress and have adopted Thai forms of greeting. The Sri Lankan Muslims speak Arabic Tamil, have Arabic names, have their own forms of greeting and the women specially could be distinguished from their dress. Many Sri Lankan Muslims had Sinhala 'ge' or

family names indicating a rank or office that they held. Some of these 'ge' names indicate very prestigious ancestry. However, there was no compulsion that the Muslims should retain the Sinhala names. It is perhaps correct to say that while the Sri Lankan Muslims have preserved their faith in Islam together with all its cultural attributes, the Thai Muslims have absorbed the external trappings of Thai culture while retaining their faith in Islam.

A major step taken by the state towards the recognition of Thai Islam has been the creation of a Thai Islam socio-religious bureaucracy with the Chularatmontri (Royal Adviser on Muslim Affairs) at the top. "The Muslim bureaucracy constitutes a workable scheme devised by the state to accord a semblance of autonomy within carefully defined lines to its Muslim population whilst ensuring that its functions and orientations were integrative". This institution has even undertaken the political socialisation of Malay Muslims. Though structurally different, the Ministry of Muslim Affairs in Sri Lanka serves the same integrative purpose of providing State support for Muslim religious activities and promoting cultural pluralism through the State

In Burma as in Thailand there are two groups of Muslims, the Burmese Muslims who like the Thai Muslims are fully integrated to the national life of the host country and the Indian Muslims who by a historical accident have become a part of the population of Burma. It is estimated that the two groups constitute approximately 4% of the population of Burma. Among the Muslims, the Indian Muslims are in the majority.¹⁰

As in Sri Lanka Muslim traders, mainly Arabs and Persians appeared in the ports of Burma soon after the birth of Islam, and flourishing colonies developed during the centuries that followed. Although trade with Burma was not very important for the Muslims, the Burmese ports were havens of refuge for the mariners during the monsoons which lasted for six months. These long sojourns resulted in inter-marriages and casual unions with Burmese women and an increase in the

Muslim population. Their descendants formed the nucleus of the Burmese Muslim community. These Muslims quickly assimilated into their surroundings, giving up their own language, customs and dress but retaining their religion.

Captain Henry Yale who was sent in 1855 to the Court of Ava as Minister of the British Governor General of India, wrote. "Their women of all ranks go unveiled and clothe as scantily as the rest of their country women". In this respect they were much more acculturated than the Sri Lankan Muslims of the same time for Reverend James Cordiner noticed in 1803 that the Muslim women in Colombo were covered from head to toe if ever they appeared in public. It was the freedom allowed to the Burmese Muslim women that was considered most unbecoming by the Indian Muslims who formed a part of Captain Yule's entourage. Their marriages were not arranged by parents and elders as was the case in India and West Asia, but in "the good old English manner", by the young people themselves. The women were even admitted to prayer in the same mosques with the men, which was considered a gross violation of all Islamic tenets

Every Burmese Muslim had two names, one Burmese and another Arabic and for all practical purposes only the former was used. On the other hand, in Sri Lanka, even today the Muslims in the Kandyan areas have two names, a traditional Sinhala family name denoting the person's ancestry and profession and an Arabic name, and for all practical purposes only the latter is known and used. The former is used only in legal documents and is useful in proving long residence in the island and ownership of land. It could be said that the Burmese Muslims were submerged in Burmese culture while tenaciously clinging to Islam. In this respect they resemble the Thai Muslims more than the Sri Lankan Muslims.

Although the Burmese Muslims rose to the eminence in the military and administrative services, built their own mosques, developed their internal organisations and practised their religion freely, yet it cannot be said that there was an unbroken record of religious tolerance in Burma as was the case

in Sri Lanka. In 1559 King Bayinnaug had forbade the Muslims from slaughtering goats and fowl and forced them to listen Buddhist sermons. Alaungpaya (1752-60) also forbade the slaughter of cattle.¹¹ It is certain that the Muslims in the Sinhala kingdom did not slaughter cattle, at least not within the boundaries of the kingdom. In this respect the Muslims of Sri Lanka tried to conform to the wishes of the majority, in so far as this did not conflict with their faith. There is one instance recorded by Ibn Batuta where a Muslim was severely punished for cattle slaughter and the offence was never repeated.

The completion of the British conquest of Burma and its annexation into the British Indian Empire in 1885 opened the doors to Indian traders many of whom were Muslims. Until the arrival of Indian Muslims the Burmese Muslims were a small inactive minority, attracting little notice. With the influx of Indian Muslims there was a revolutionary change in the life of the community. The new migrants were a vociferous minority which made itself hated by local populace and creating socio-economic problems which persist till the present day.

Burma was sparsely populated and when new avenues of employment were opened after British occupation the Indians invaded every field. Soon the numbers of Indian Muslims in Burma were double that of Burmese Muslims. The professions and certain government departments were Indianised. Traders and shop keepers in Burma's towns and villages were almost always Indian Muslims. To further complicate matters they sometimes took Burmese women which led to serious social problems.

The Indian Muslims tried to preserve their separate cultural and religious identity by developing a series of religious activities; established mosques and schools and started their own newspapers. The attitudes and aspirations of the Indian Muslims differed widely from those of the Burmese Muslims. The latter wished to achieve pre-eminence within the Burmese Buddhist public, while the Indian Muslims wished to strengthen their ties with India. For instance the Indian Muslims taught Arabic and Urdu in their schools while the Burmese

Muslims demanded the introduction of Burmese. Tension between the two groups of Muslims mounted with the rise of the Burmese National Movement, when the Burmese Muslims worked hand in hand with their Burmese compatriots while the Indian Muslims towed the line with the Muslims of India and were concerned with Pan-Islamic activities. As a result of these differences of opinion the Burmese Muslims did not wish to be associated with the Indian Muslims who were considered as foreigners by the Burmese.

The accumulated tension resulting from professional jealousy, commercial rivalry and social disruption erupted in the Anti-Muslim Riots of 1938. Although the hostility was first directed against the Indian Muslims, the difference between the two groups was soon blurred in the eyes of the rioters and all Muslims became victims. In some ways this outburst resembles the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915, which too was the result of sordid commercial rivalry between the Sinhalese and Coast Moors but later took on a religious grab and engulfed even Sri Lankan Muslims.

The position of Muslims in China has always been a difficult one varying between uneasy co-existence and cultural confrontation, sometimes leading to open rebellion. From the time that Muslim traders came to China in the eighth century they were continuously adapting themselves, to the fluctuating and occasionally hostile environment. Nevertheless there had been distinguished Chinese Muslims, and one of them Admiral Cheng Ho who achieve international fame as a diplomat and military strategist in the early 15th century. Cheng Ho's father and grandfather had been Haj pilgrims which go to prove that some of the Chinese Muslims maintained links with the centres of Islamic power.¹²

In the 16th century contact with the fountains of Islamic power became difficult as the Arabs had been displaced by the Portuguese. During the 17th and 18th centuries the state adopted a policy of integration leading to forced Sinicisation. Under the Mings (1368-1644) many mosques were built tapering like Chinese pagodas instead of the minarets which are typical of

Muslim houses of prayer. With the disappearance of the minaret it was not possible for the Muezzin to summon the faithful to prayer in the traditional way. Instead the stood indoors behind the entrance to the mosque and called for prayer. The interior, however, was traditionally Muslim, clean and austere. The only indication of Chinese culture was seen of the Emperor's Tablets that were mandatory in any house of prayer. On the walls there were Koranic inscription and the west end of the mosque (the direction of Mecca) was adorned with arabesques. Once inside, the worshippers put on their white caps, remove their shoes, perform the ablutions meticulously and begin their prayers in Arabic.

In public Muslims used Chinese names and spoke Chinese, but with fellow Muslims they would use their Arabic names and speak a Chinese mixed with many Arabic and Persian words. This situation which persists till today resulted in considerable tension and even rebellion, for the Muslims had to maintain a delicate balance between the emotional attraction towards the Islamic core and the assimilative pressures of the all pervasive Sinic environment.

The inward-outward dichotomy which oppressed the Chinese Muslims was never prevalent in Sri Lanka, due no doubt to the magnanimous attitude adopted by the Sinhala kings to the people of other faiths. It will be seen in the course of this study that there are a number of mosques in the country built on land donated by the Kandyan kings for the purpose, e.g. the Katu Palliya in Kandy and Maddulbova and Kahatapitiya mosques. There were instances where the *bhikkhus* had permitted mosques to be built on Buddhist monastic land for the benefit of the Muslim villagers. For instance the Pangollamada mosque was built on land belonging to the Degaldoruve Vihara and the mosque at Rambukandana on land belonging to the Ridi Vihara at Kurunegala. Further, the *bhikkhus* of the Ridi Vihara supported a Muslim priest to minister to the spiritual needs of the Muslim tenants living in monastic lands. In this manner, as the Muslims became structurally integrated into the socio-economic system, their religious individuality was not effaced but enhanced. The Sri

Lanka Kings even encouraged the Muslims to maintain their links with the Islamic world as this was mutually beneficial. As a result a state of peaceful co-existence, unique in an era of religious persecution and rivalry developed in Sri Lanka.

The benevolent attitude of the Sinhala kings was not confined to the Muslims alone. The Hindu shrines were apart of the state maintained religious organisation of the Kandyan Kingdom. "The Christian Religion he doth not in the least persecute or dislike, but rather as it seems to me esteems and honours it,"¹³ says Robert Knox of Rajasinghe II (1635-1681) though he had every reason to dislike him. Such tolerance was practised at a time when the Christian in the low country were his bitterest enemies. Regarding the king's subjects the same authority states, "Nor are they charitable to the poor of their own nation but as I said to others; and particularly to the Moorish beggars who are Mohametans by Religion."¹⁴ In this atmosphere of religious freedom it was not difficult for the Muslims to preserve their Islamic identity and at the same time maintain their links with the rest of society.

The mother tongue of the Muslims of Sri Lanka has been the subject of controversy. Those in the north and east speak only Tamil while those in the rest of the island are completely bilingual. The earliest migrants from the Middle East spoke Arabic, which were the language of the Koran and the language of devotion. Hence it has for the Muslims the sanctity that Pali has for the Buddhists. However since Tamil was widely used in maritime commerce in the Indian Ocean it became a practical necessity for the Muslim traders to speak Tamil.

The second wave of Muslim migrants came to Sri Lanka from South India. The earlier Arab traders who settled in the South Indian ports married local women who together with their children embraced Islam. These small Muslim communities were numerically strengthened by considerable numbers of converts from Hinduism. As the Muslims population of South India grew, Tamil and Malayalam came to be written in the Arabic script, with certain changes to

accommodate Tamil phonetics. A number of Arabic words have been introduced to express Islamic concepts and certain social activities that cannot be entirely dissociated from religion. This dialect came to be known as Arabic Tamil. The Muslims of South India were familiar with the literature of the Islamic world and some of these works were translated into Arabic Tamil. Commercial contacts between the Muslims of South India and Sri Lanka strengthened cultural contacts and vice versa. Generations of Sri Lankan Muslims went to the theological institutions in Vellore in pursuit of Islamic learning which they disseminated on their return. The ties of friendship which grew up were such that the personages who were venerated by the South Indian Muslims were equally respected by the Sri Lankan Muslims. Names like Sathakathulla Appah, Mappillai Lebbe Alim were all known alike on both sides of the Palk Strait.¹⁵ All this communication was through Arabic Tamil. It became to the Muslims not only the language of commerce but also the language of Islamic culture. The Koran was translated into Arabic Tamil while it was not translated into Sinhala till very recently. Since it was obligatory for the Muslim children to read the Koran they had to be versed in Arabic Tamil. This partly explains why Muslims who have for centuries lived in wholly Sinhala speaking areas retain Arabic Tamil as their mother tongue.

In this study the author has deviated from the traditional view of history which deals with kings and courts, politics and wars, and focuses attention on the lives of ordinary men and women who have left their footprints on the sands of time the nameless multitude acting more or less unconsciously together and constituting a social force. "Which was the greater innovator? He who first led armies over the Alps and gained the victories of Cannae and Thrasymene or the homeless boor who first mannered out for himself an iron spade?"¹⁶ what is echoed in these pages is not the sound of bugles or the clash of swords, but the melodious tinkle of the bells tied round the necks of the pack oxen in the caravans or tavalam carts of the Udarata while the sonorous tone of the Buddhist temple bells reverberated among the hills. Political history which is regarded as the

backbone of history is only peripheral to this study and provides only the framework within which the nameless masses moved. More important is the manner in which groups of humble farmers, weavers, barbers and other such lowly folk, lived, ate and prayed and in the course of centuries evolved a means of living together in peace and harmony with their neighbours. In common with the rest of South Asia the key to the understanding of Sri Lanka's history lies in the infrastructure of society, tradition, custom, religion, ideas rather than in a chronological list of political events.

The sources for this study could be for convenience divided into five categories, Sinhalese, Portuguese, Dutch, early British and Arabic. The Sinhalese sources are either official documents or literary sources. To the former category belong a series of land grants given by Sinhala kings to Muslims in return for services rendered in various capacities. One example is the Gataberiya Sannasa of 1760 given by Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-1781) to the Muslim physician who saved his life from the conspirators. This is one of the few extant from several such granted to generations of Muslims. A.C. Lawrie, in his *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces of Ceylon*, gives translations of several grants made to Muslims and makes references to many others. The originals are lost or have perished. Though not strictly official the Buddhist monastic records can be placed in the same category. These give lists of Muslim tenants occupying temple lands and rendering service to the temple. Some like the *Comasaris pota* of 1870 have been compiled at the request of the British. For instance the *Comasaris pota* of the Ridi Vihara in Kurunegala gives interesting details regarding the Muslim tenants of the *Ridi Vihara*, their family names and the type of work they did for their livelihood. Information was also drawn from Sinhala literary works like the *Rajavaliya* and the *Sandesa* poems.

Portuguese and Dutch sources have to be used with caution since these Europeans were inveterate enemies of the Muslims. However, they provide valuable insights into the harassments suffered by the Muslims at the hands of the Europeans. Father Queyroz is reliable with regard to Portuguese

attitudes to and treatment of the Muslims. The memories of Dutch Governors of the maritime provinces, which they left to their successors in office, though prejudiced against the Muslims are trustworthy when used discreetly.

Among the British writers, Robert Knox, James Cordiner, John Davy, John D'Oyly and Emerson Tennent, all make passing references to some aspect or other of the Muslims. The first official connection the British had with Kandy was in 1762 when John Pybus came to the court from Madras to negotiate a treaty with the King. His diary gives information about Muslim villages in the north east that he passed and the caravans of Muslim traders which he met on his way to Kandy. This type of eye witness accounts of how the average Muslims lived 200 years ago is not found elsewhere.

Special mention should be made of Sir Alexander Johnstone, Chief Justice of Ceylon (1806-1807 and 1811-1819) who did a special study of indigenous legal systems. The Alexander Johnstone papers on Native Laws and Customs found at the Sri Lanka National Archives have a section on Special Laws relating to Mohammedans. In the course of his work Johnstone has interviewed many learned Muslim priests and physicians of his day and has collected and recorded valuable information regarding Muslim traditions, medicine, law and customs.

The Service Tenure Registers compiled by the British over 100 years ago contain information about Muslims in the Kandyan areas. These registers, some of which are handwritten in English are available to the researcher. Of particular importance is the Service Tenure Register of the Dalada Maligava or Temple of the Tooth in Kandy which is now preserved in the Kandy Kachcheri.

A few Arabic inscriptions found in Sri Lanka dating from the ninth century confirm not only the presence of Muslims but indicate the influential position they held in society. Coins belonging to several Muslim dynasties and Middle Eastern artifacts unearthed in different parts of the

island reveal the extent and volume of Arab trade. Thus archeological and numismatic sources confirm to a large extent what we learn from literary sources.

A vast storehouse of Arabic historical and geographical literature remains untapped. An attempt was made to explore translations and secondary sources. The *Rehla* of Ibn Batuta proved to be a mine of information regarding the presence and status of Muslims in fourteenth century Sri Lanka.

It was found necessary in the course of this inquiry to visit Muslim villages, mosques and Buddhist monasteries and hold interviews with descendants of old Muslim families, Muslim physicians, trustees of mosques and several eminent bhikkhus. These visits proved to be fascinating and productive. Many old residents cherished memories of their ancestors who enjoyed cordial relations with the Sinhala kings. Muslim physicians recollect their student days in Buddhist monasteries. Several elderly bhikkhus including the *Mahanayaka* of the Malwatta *Vihara* were aware of Muslims rendering service to the *viharas* within living memory. It was observed that in remote areas which were less modernised, less commercial and less politicised there still prevails a healthy spirit of cooperation between the Sinhala and Muslim peasants and also between the Muslims and the *bhikkhus*.

NOTES

1. E.H.Carr, *What is History*, Penguin Books, 1970, p.134.
2. K.M. de Silva, "The Muslim minority in a democratic polity: The case of Sri Lanka, Reflections on a theme", in M.A.M. Shukri (ed.) *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, Colombo, 1986. PP. 443-450.
3. Reverend James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*, Sri Lanka, 1983, p. 69.
4. James Emerson Tennent, *Ceylon*, Vols, I and II, Sri Lanka, 1977. Vol.I,pp.534-535. Emerson Tennent was the Colonial Secretary to the Government of Ceylon from 1845-1850.
5. See p. 74.
6. See p. 93.
7. Emerson Tennent, pp.534-535.
8. Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: The Study of a Minority Group*, Wiesbaden, 1972, p. 10, footnote 8.
9. For the information regarding Thailand the author is indebted to Omar Farouk Bajunid, "The Muslim minority in the Thai Buddhist Polity: Problems and Prospects of Political Integration". Paper submitted to the seminar on Muslim minorities in Sri Lanka, South and South East Asia, Beruwala, January 5-9, 1984.
10. For information regarding the Muslims of Burma, the author is indebted to Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma* and Captain Henry Yule, *A Narrative of Mission sent by the Governor General of India to the Court of Ava in 1855, with notices of the country, Government & People*. London: Smith, Elder 1858 pp. 150-152.
11. Moshe Yegar, p. 10.
12. For information regarding Muslims in China the author is indebted to Raphael Israeli, *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation*, Bangkok, 1980 and also by the same author, "Muslims in China: "The incompatibility between Island and the Chinese Order", in

Proceedings of the Seventh International Association of Historians of Asia conference, Bangkok 1977, Vol. 1, pp.131 – 167.

13. Robert Knox, *An Historical Relation of Ceylon, Sri Lanka*, 1981, p.166.
14. Knox, pp. 233-234.
15. A.M.A. Azeez, “Cultural contacts between the Muslims of South India and Ceylon”. English rendering of a Presidential address delivered in Tamil at Madras on 6th February 1955. Found at the M.I.C.H. Also A.M.A. Azeez, “The Ceylon Muslims and the Mother Tongue”, *Ceylon Daily News* of 10th December 1941.
16. Julian Symons ed; *Carlyle, Selected Works, Reminiscences and Letters*, Cambridge, Mass. (1967) p. 50.

II. MERCHANTS AND PILGRIMS

The Foundation of Religious and

Racial Harmony c.900-1500 A.D

“In the mountains around Adam’s Peak, they collect precious stones of every description and in the valleys they find those diamonds by means of which they engrave the setting of stones of rings.

The same mountains produce aromatic drugs, perfumes and aloes-wood, and there too they find the animals, the civet, which yields musk. The Islanders cultivate rice, coco-nuts, and sugar-cane; in the rivers is found rock crystal, remarkable both for brilliancy and size, and the sea on every side has a fishery of magnificent and priceless pearls. Throughout India there is no price whose wealth can compare with the King of Serendib, his immense riches, his pearls and his jewels, being the produce of his own dominions and seas; and thither ships of China, and of every neighbouring country resort, bringing the wines of Irak and Fars, which the King buys for sale to his subjects; for he drinks wine and prohibits debauchery; whilst other princes of India encourage debauchery and prohibit the use of wine, The exports from Serendib consist of silk, precious stones, crystals, diamonds and perfumes.”

Al Idrisi (1155 A.D.)

The Arabs have been known in Asia as traders even before the birth of Islam. However, in the trade with China and the Far-East the Arabs were preceded by the Persians. A focal point of Persian trade was Sri Lanka and it is known that the Sassanian Emperors had maintained diplomatic relations with the court at Anuradhapura in the 5th century A.D.¹ Chinese ships sailed into Sri Lankan ports with cargoes of silk, while the Persians brought merchandise from the West. Sri Lanka was the collecting and distributing centre where the distant mariners and those from neighbouring India exchanged their wares and also purchased the island’s produce.

Soon after its birth in Arabia, Islam was embraced by the Persians who adopted the Arabic language as well. The new faith added a fresh dynamism to their far flung commercial activities specially because merchants enjoy a high social status in Islamic society and travel overseas for trade and missionary activities was encouraged.

Within a short time the whole of West Asia, Northern Africa up to the shore of the Atlantic had come under the victorious banner of Islam. At the beginning of the 8th century Islamic power had extended to the Sind and Multan. The new faith had infused a sense of spiritual unity among the diverse races. With the rise of the Abbasid Empire (751-1258) with the capital at Baghdad Muslim commercial domination in Asia had commenced. In the 9th & 10th centuries an assortment of Persians, Arabs, Abyssinians, all Muslims, speaking Arabic and therefore conveniently called “Arabs” dominated the overseas trade from Baghdad to China.²

By about the 9th century, there was Arab trading communities well established in Sri Lanka specially in the island’s coastal towns enjoying the favour of the rulers and maintaining cordial relations with the local inhabitants. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the major events and examine the process which over the centuries facilitated the establishment of harmonious relationship between the Arabs and later the Moors³ and the Sinhalese, a relationship which continued for a thousand years, with no major rupture till the outbreak of the Sinhala-Muslim riots of 1915.

Sri Lanka has been referred to several times by Ibn Khurdabdhbih (c345A.D) in his *Kitab-al-Masalik-Wa’l-Mamalik*, the oldest work of Arab geography that has come down to us under the name of Sarandib, a corruption of Sanskrit, Sinhaladvipa. Sarandib was sometimes used in the narrow sense to denote only that district in which Adam’s Peak was situated. Then the whole island was called Siyalan and sometimes Sahilan. Besides Sarandib, the Greek name Tabrubani was also used by Arab writers. These numerous references show that the contact between Sri Lanka and Arabia

was not merely commercial but at times cultural as well. Ibn Shahriyar who wrote his *Ajaib-Al-Hind* around 953A.D. records that the people of Sri Lanka, hearing of the teaching of the Holy Prophet during his life time selected an able person from among themselves and sent him to Arabia to get more authentic information about the Islamic teaching. When after a long and hazardous journey the messenger reached Medina, the Prophet had died (632A.D.). The messenger met the Caliph Umar (633-644) and learnt from him all the details about the Prophet and his teachings, but on his return journey he died. However, his servant who had accompanied him returned to Sri Lanka and communicated to the people of the island all he knew of the faith and its early history. One cannot expect the servant to be an able exponent of the Islamic teachings which he may have picked up from his master. Had his able master survived the journey, the consequences may have been different. Nevertheless the servant did create a good impression and due to this Muslims were welcome in Sri Lanka.⁴

A similar reference is made by the 16th century Persian historian, Firishteh who mentions that Muslim contact with Sri Lanka can be traced to the days of the pious Caliphs.⁵ Neither, Ibn Shahriyar nor Firishteh mentions their sources of information. However, considering the brisk commercial contact between the two countries, the story is a plausible one. It is not unlikely that the pre-Islamic Arabs of Sri Lanka, having heard of the spiritual upheaval in their motherland managed to arrange this mission to Arabia.

A tradition recorded by the historian Al-Balazuri who died in 892, points to the fact that the rulers of Sri Lanka took positive action to maintain good relations with the Islamic world since this was essential for continuance of commercial pursuits. It is stated that prior to the Arab conquest of the Sind in 715, the King of the "Island of Rubies", as Sri Lanka was sometimes known, in order to win the favour of Hajjaj bin Yusuf the powerful viceroy of Iraq, repatriated some orphaned girls who were born in Sri Lanka. Their fathers who were Muslim merchants had died. The ships conveying the girls were

attacked by pirates near modern Karachi and this incident resulted in the annexation of Sind to the Arab empire.⁶

In and about the 9th and 10th centuries there are many references to Sri Lanka by the Muslim writers. Some of whom are Sulaiman Thajir Ibn Masudi and Ibn Shahriyar. Some of the products of Sri Lanka, mentioned by the writers are spices, valuable timber, the finest rubies, *kitul treacle* cherished by kings and nobles, medical herbs and iron. From the ninth to fifteenth centuries it was a distributing centre for Chinese silk to the Western market.

Archaeological evidence confirms that Arab trade had increased in volume in the 9th and 10th centuries and sizeable Muslim settlements had emerged on coastal towns. Special mention should be made of Mantota (which is the ancient Mahatittha and modern Mantai).

Mantota, which was a vital link in the East-West trade when it was under Persian control, maintained for many reasons its pre-eminent position in the Arab commercial empire. Mantota was the chief port of the Anuradapura Kingdom and there was a highway connecting it with the capital. Also this port lay on two international trade routes; one proceeding along the Malabar Coast and thence to Arabia, Persia and Egypt, and the other along the Coromandal coast to the Bay of Bengal and to Malacca, Sumatra, Java, Moluccas and China. Consequently Mantota became for the Arab traders what it had been for the Persians, a great emporium for their East-West trade. Archaeological excavations in and round Mantota have unearthed Middle-Eastern ceramic ware approximately dated between the 8th and 11th centuries and also Chinese ceramics of the same time.⁷ Three Arabic inscriptions erected over Muslim burials have been unearthed in this area. The first was found in the island off Puliyantivu in the Mannar District;⁸ the second off the Puttalam-Kurunegala Road and the third off the Puttalam-Anuradapura Road.⁹ All these have been attributed on epigraphical grounds to the 9th and 10th centuries confirming Arab presence in the ports during in the late Anuradhapura

period and also the fact that they travelled to the interior towns for purpose of trade.

Recent excavations in certain archaeological sites in Sri Lanka, undertaken by the UNESCO Cultural Triangle Project have unearthed what are known as “Sassanian Islamic” ceramic storage jars approximately dated from the seventh to the ninth centuries. Some of these have been found among the ruins of the ancient hospital site at Mihintale in Anuradhapura. Similar sherds are found throughout the coastal areas of the Indian Ocean trade. In Sri Lanka the largest quantities of imported ceramics are the ungainly storage jars which were very likely used as containers for more precious commodities or to store water during long sea voyages. It is possible that either medicine were imported to the Mihintale hospital in these jars or stored in them. Middle-Eastern ceramic jars approximately dated in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries have been found, denoting the continuation of the commercial contacts during the Polonnaruwa period.

That the Sri Lankans benefited immensely from this peaceful trade is evident from the observations of Alexander Johnstone. He states that in the days of Arab commercial prosperity the Giants Tank (Yoda Vava built by King Dhatusena (450-473) which was near Mantota was maintained in perfect repair and irrigated large tracts of fields in the neighbourhood. In the Dry Zone, agriculture was entirely dependent on irrigation and constant vigilance, manpower and economic resource were needed to maintain the efficient functioning of the hydraulic system. The surplus wealth came largely from foreign trade which was in the hands of the Arabs. Johnstone adds that in his day the Giants Tank was abandoned and the surrounding areas had become a desert.¹⁰ Arab trade was therefore vital to the country’s economy.

A 10th century Arabic inscription written in Kufic characters found in the National Museum in Colombo proves that the contact with the Arab world was not merely commercial but religious and cultural as well. The Arab community in Colombo requested the Caliph of Baghdad to

send a religious teacher who would instruct them in the tenets and practices of Islam. In response to this request Khalid Ibn Abu Bakaya, a learned and pious Muslim priest was sent to teach the Muslims of Colombo, organise them into an Islamic community and erect a mosque so as to ensure the continuing observance of Muslim worship. Having achieved all these objectives, Abu Bakaya died in Colombo in 948 A.D. and was buried near the mosque he had erected. After his death the Caliph of Baghdad sent some learned persons to Colombo for the express purpose of engraving an inscription on his tombstone. It remained on his grave for 800 years till the Dutch *disave* or collector of Colombo, removed it along with other tombstones from the Muslim burial ground near Colombo and placed it as a stepping stone to his residence. It was still there in the time of Alexander Johnstone but was subsequently removed to the National Museum in Colombo. The Arabic inscription records a prayer to Allah for response of the soul of Abu Bakaya.¹¹

Many salient facts relating to the Arab settlements in the tenth century in Sri Lanka emerge from a study of the background of the tombstone.

Firstly, the Muslims of Colombo were sufficiently numerous and influential as to persuade the Caliph to send such a respected teacher to their midst. Secondly, it shows that they had intimate and constant communication with the Caliphs of Baghdad. It was obligatory for Muslims to maintain links with the main body of Islam (Dar-al-Islam). As is clear from this incident this contact had provided them spiritual nourishment, strengthened their sense of identity in Sri Lanka and heightened their awareness of belonging to the Islamic brotherhood. Even at this time, the organisation of the community, religious education and the continuance of the prescribed form of prayer had received priority consideration.

Frequent communication with the centres of Islamic power was possible because of the co-operation of the local rulers and also because the latter maintained good relations with the Caliphs of Baghdad. This incident also shows that the kings

of Sri Lanka were magnanimous in their attitude to people of other faiths. Even today, religious minorities all over the world make three claims, freedom of conscience, freedom of worship and the absence of religious discrimination. Freedom of conscience amounts to protection against forcible conversion. Obviously, the Arabs enjoyed this freedom, or else no Muslim would have remained in the island. Very few religions are satisfied with only a private recognition of their faith; they usually want a public display by building religious edifices and performing their ceremonies. Further they went to benefit from the right of association and be allowed complete liberty in all matter concerning their internal organization. The fact that Abu Bakaya's mission was a success proves that the second, freedom of worship too had been allowed to Arabs in common with people of all other faiths. Thirdly, it will be seen in the course of this study that there was complete absence of religious discrimination which meant that no disability was imposed on members of the Muslim minority; that they raised to high office and occupied positions of power and influence.

Arab authors record that the court of Sri Lanka was particularly noted for its religious tolerance. Idrisi, writing in the 12th century mentions a council of 16 at the Royal court, consisting of four Buddhists; four Muslims four Christians and four Jews showing that the people of all faiths were welcomed and respected.¹² The council referred to was possibly summoned to advise the king on matters of trade.

Although the Muslims had settled in the coastal towns with the blessings of the rulers, it took them some time to penetrate into the interior. Their place of special attraction was Sabaragamuwa, renowned for its precious stones, for which there was a world-wide market. The mariners returning from their eastern expeditions provided the story tellers of the Arabian Nights with accounts of the fabulous jewels of Sarandib. Commenting on the country's wealth of gems, Marco Polo states, "For in this island, and nowhere else in the world, are produced superb and authentic rubies. The island also produces sapphires, topazes, amethysts, garnets and many other precious stones, and I assure you that the king of this province

possesses the finest ruby that exists in this world the finest certainly, that was ever seen or is ever likely to be seen”¹³ The Arabs were naturally eager to reach Sabaragamuwa the source of all this wealth. Fortuitously, in Sabaragamuwa lay the Holy Mountain, on top of which was Siripada, the sacred Footprint which the Buddhists believe to be that of the Buddha, and the Hindus worship as that of Lord Siva.

In or about the 9th century Siripada became associated with Adam’s fall from Paradise, and came to be venerated as Adam’s Peak by the Muslims, who considered Adam as their forefather. Adam’s Peak is well known throughout the Muslim world as the first spot on earth where Adam set foot when he was driven out of Paradise. The spices which grew on the island are said to have sprung from the leaves of branches that Adam was allowed to bring from Paradise (Encyclopedia of Islam). Ibn Batuta who came to Sri Lanka in 1344 testifies that at the beginning the Sinhalese resisted the Muslims finding easy access to the interior of their country.¹⁴ But when Siripada became Adam’s Peak the gem seekers became pilgrims and ingratiated themselves to the Sinhalese who were always tolerant in matters spiritual. The Muslim traders could now join the pilgrim bands ascend the peak to pay homage to the shrine and acquire the gems on their return, thus achieving a dual purpose, both spiritual and material. It is remarkable that there was no conflict arising from the fact that the newcomers were disputing the age old belief of the Sinhalese that the impression on the rock was the footprint of the Buddha. Marco Polo makes another interesting observation regarding the religious beliefs prevalent at the time. The “idolaters” (Buddhists) believed that the shrine on the peak, the tooth, hair and bone relics enshrined in various places in the island all belong to Buddha, whereas the Saracens (Arabs) who came on pilgrimage in large numbers held that they all belonged to Adam.¹⁵ However, there was no conflict despite the divergent views.

Since the king was considered, *bhupati* or lord of the earth, all the treasures of the earth and the sea, such as gems and pearls and all forest products including elephants and tusks were royal monopolies. The inhabitants of particular villages

were employed by the treasury, under the superintendence of hereditary officers to search for gems. Any others who wished to hunt for gems had to obtain permission by paying five ducats (gold coins) and giving the treasury all gems over ten carats.¹⁶ Since the Arabs were now ostensibly pilgrims they could reach the gem land circumventing these obligations.

The fact that Adam's Peak was a favourite place of pilgrimage for Muslims is testified by several references to it in the records of Arab travellers. Sulaiman an Arab trader and explorer recount his visit to Sri Lanka in 850 A.D. and mention a pilgrimage to Adam's Peak. These journeys into the mountain wilderness of a strange country must have been wrought with danger specially if the local population was not co-operative. Although the Sinhalese in the coastal areas were used to seeing Arab traders, to the Sinhalese in the interior they must have been an unfamiliar sight at least to begin with. Hence they resisted the early incursions. "Previously infidels (Buddhists) prevented the Muslims from visiting it (the Foot), vexed them and neither dined with them nor had any dealings with them".¹⁷ The facility to penetrate into the gem country without arousing the suspicious of the Sinhalese villages was the culmination of a series of efforts. The piety and devotion of some of the Muslim saints, their display of supernatural powers seemed to have impressed the Sinhalese very much.

According to Ibn Batuta, the first Muslim pilgrim "to have opened the way" to the Peak was Shaikh Abu Abdullah Khafif who came to Sri Lanka in 929 A.D.¹⁸ Since it is known that there were Arab pilgrims to the Peak before this date, Ibn Batuta probably meant that Shaikh Abu Abdullah was responsible for dispelling all suspicions in the minds of the Sinhalese and thereby clearing the way for future Arab pilgrims. It is said in the *Rehla* that the Shaikh, a highly respected personage in Persia, together with 30 other dervishes visited Sri Lanka. At this time the Sinhalese villagers of the interior were reluctant to communicate with these strangers. While travelling through the mountain paths that led to the Peak the pilgrims were in need of food. Seeing large numbers of baby elephants around, the dervishes expressed a desire to

capture them to satisfy their hunger. The saint objected to this but the dervishes overcome by hunger and fatigue, disregarded the Shaikh's wishes slaughtered a young elephant and devoured him. The Shaikh did not participate in this diet. In the dead of night when the dervishes were sleeping, the elephant herd took their revenge, killing all the dervishes. They sniffed the Shaikh and aware of his innocence, one of the herd lifted him by its trunk, placed him on its back and took him to the inhabited area. When an astonished crowd of people gathered around, the elephant took the Shaikh by its trunk and placed him on the ground so that all may see him. The people took the Shaikh to the king and narrated the miraculous story to him.¹⁹ This is quite an acceptable story since the Sri Lankan elephant is well known for acts of gratitude and revenge. It is said that the Shaikh continued to live among the Sinhalese in Chilaw for some time and later returned to his motherland where he died in Shiraz in 943 A.D.²⁰

The fame and piety of this saint would certainly have spread among the Sinhalese in many parts of the country and thereby enhanced the image of the Arab pilgrims. "The infidels began from that day to honour the Musalmans. They admitted them to their houses, dined with them and would entrust them with their wives and children. And up to this day they revere the said Shaikh and call him the Great Shaikh".²¹

At the time of Ibn Batuta's visit there were Muslim dignitaries who were held in high esteem by the Sinhala kings and people. One was Shaikh Usman who had his mosque outside the royal city of Konkar (not precisely identified), who acted as Ibn Batuta's guide to Adam's Peak. The King and the people visited this holy man. Mention is made of Ustad Mahmud Luri a pious man who lived in a cave near this capital city. Baba Tahir and Baba khuzi were other pious Muslims that Ibn Batuta encountered during his itinerary in Sri Lanka. At a place which Ibn Batuta calls Mannar Mandall (Minneri Mandal), he met a Muslim from Khurasan stranded on account of illness.²² The fact that there were a number of Muslim shrines and holy men around the capital city and also along the path to the Holy Mountain indicated that they were not only

accepted but also respected in Sinhala society. That there were considerable numbers of Arab pilgrims to Adam's Peak in Ibn Batuta's time is proved by the fact that one of the 10 chains suspended from iron pegs for the support of the pilgrims ascending the peak, had been called the chain of the Islamic creed. This was so named by the Muslims because when the pilgrims reached this chain and looked at the yawning abyss below, gripped with fear he would automatically recite the Islamic prayer.²³ It is certain that most of the pilgrims were traders as well and in this manner they began to participate in the internal trade.

There is no evidence of large Muslim settlements in the interior of the island at this time but the number of pilgrims to the Peak increased from the 9th to 14th centuries and the path to the Peak became punctuated by shrines and caves of holy men. An Arabic inscription ascribed to the 13th century, found in the Bhagavalena, a cave about 100 feet below the summit of Adam's Peak is interesting as a memorial of Muslim pilgrims to the Peak. It has attracted further notice since it is written by the side of a Sinhala inscription of King Nissanka Malla (1187-1196) recording his visit to the Peak and also granting several villages for the maintenance of the shrine. The Arabic inscription which is fragmentary states, "Muhammed, May God Bless Him.....The father of Mankind".²⁴ The existence side by side, on the recess of the sacred Peak of a Sinhala Buddhist inscription and an Arabic Islamic one, is symbolic of the spirit of religious harmony that prevailed and still continues to pervade the pilgrims of various races and religious while ascending the Holy Mountain.

During the 13th century the Sinhala rulers who had their capital at Polonnaruwa, were harassed by invasions, first from Magha of Kalinga (1215), then, Chandrabhanu, a Javaka from the Malay Peninsula (1274) and later from Pandya. In 1248 the Sinhalese had to face the invasion of the Pandya general Ariya Cakravarti who carried away the Palladium of the Sinhalese, the Tooth Relic and Alms Bowl of the Buddha, to the Pandya capital. These were later recovered and restored to Polonnaruwa but soon after, the Sinhalese, fatigued by foreign invasions and

internal strife, lost their political and economic grip over the Rajarata and was forced to seek a new life in the south of the Island. The elaborate hydraulic structures which for over a thousand years gave life and wealth to the naturally barren plains fell into disuse and disrepair and the jungle reclaimed its dominance over the tank country.

Another important development which followed the invasions and the consequent abandonment of the Dry Zone was the rise of the Ariya Cakravarti line of rulers in north Sri Lanka, who to begin with was feudatories of the Pandya Empire. When a war of succession broke out in the Pandya capital one of the rival claimants sought the help of the Sultan of Delhi, Ala-ud-din Khalji (1296-1316), who at this time was practically master of the whole of Northern India. In response to this request, Malik Kafur (the deputy of the state) was sent by the Sultan on his devastating raid of the Deccan and in 1311; Malik Kafur appeared at the Pandya capital of Madurai which he found deserted.

In the midst of these misfortunes suffered by its Pandya overloads, and isolated from Sinhala interference by primeval jungle which had overrun the Rajarata, the Ariya Cakravarti of Jaffna was left free to manage his own affairs. As a result of the war of succession and the consequent threat of Muslim invasion Pandya notables, business men and others sought refuge in Jaffna and strengthened it. Simultaneously, it benefited from the increasing pre-occupations of the Sinhala monarch with internal disruptions and foreign invasions to develop as an independent principality. With the elimination of its Pandya overlord by the Turkish invader in 1311, the incipient Kingdom of Jaffna began to follow an independent course of action.

Thus the end the 13th century, virtually saw the end of the country's unified domination. The country as fragmented into a number of small principalities including Jaffna. The capital moved from place to place; the rulers seeking natural fortresses like Yapahuva, Dambadeniya, Kurunegala and Gampola showing the insecurity in which they lived. Parts of the Rajarata fell into the hands of forest chieftans known as

Vanniyars further isolating Jaffna from the rest of the country. This pattern continued for the next few centuries and at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese (1505) the island was divided into kingdoms of Kotte, Kandy and Jaffna and other smaller principalities which waxed and waned with the personalities of the rulers.

With the political disarray and the consequent abandonment of the great rice yielding plains of the Rajarata, economic decline was inevitable. In the heyday of the hydraulic civilization the mainstay of the treasury was the land tax and now the state had to look for other means of sustenance. The flourishing trade of the South East Asia was the answer and this trade was in the hands of the Muslims who were already well established in the island's ports and were participating in the inland trade as well. Sri Lanka's traditional friendly ties with the Muslims stood in good stead at this hard-pressed moment. There was another factor in Sri Lanka's favour. Since the 12th century the production and export of spices was being developed by Muslim traders of the Moluccas. The participation in this trade was an opportunity for the Sinhala kingdoms, for cinnamon, rated the finest in the world grew in abundance in the South West of the country where the new kingdoms were located.

Alexander Johnstone records how in the 12th and 13th centuries the Muslims had established an island wide network of agents and sub-agents so as to collect all the marketable products of the country for export. They had their agents at each port to send them the produce of the hinterland. Thus from Trincomalee they collected the rice and indigo from the Eastern province; from Jaffna the *Chaya* root (which is a red dye), wood of the black palmyra used for rafters and chank shells used for ceremonial purposes in temples; from Kudiramalai pearls; from Puttalam areca nut and betel leaves, ebony, satin and calamander wood for furniture and sappan wood which produces a deep orange dye; from Colombo cinnamon and precious stones; from Beruwala coconut oil and coir, and from Galle ivory and elephants. All the valuable products of the island were stored in the immense warehouses which the

Muslim merchants had erected in Mannar and Mantota. By means of armed vessels which they maintained at their own expense, near the island of Mannar, they guarded the trade routes and their trading interests²⁵ from pirates who were rampant in the Indian Ocean.

It is reasonable to assume that in all the above mentioned ports where the Muslims merchants had their sub agents, the Muslim community was numerically strong and wielded influence. It was seen that as early as the 10th century the Muslims in Colombo had their own mosque and were aware of their separate identity. Two tombstones unearthed recently in Nicholson's Cove, overlooking the Trincomalee Harbour, show that there was Muslim settlement in the vicinity as far back as the 12th century. One tomb was that of a respected Qazi Alif Abdullah Ibn Abdur Rahman Ibn Mohammed Ibn Yusuf Al-Alavi who passed away in approximately 1211. The other inscription identified the grave of the noble, pious and chaste lady, daughter of Amir Badr ud din Hussain, son of Ali Al-Halabi.²⁶ Judging from these titles it is fairly evident that there was a colony of influential Muslims in Trincomalee at the time. There appears to have been a burial place of Muslims close by.

When Ibn Batuta visited Colombo, there lived a minister and admiral named Jalasti who had with him 500 Abyssinians. In Galle there was Captain Ibrahim who entertained Batuta at his house.²⁷ Six years later, John de Marignolli mentions a "Saracen" tyrant Chojah John (Khwajah Jahan) at Perivills, probably Beruwala.²⁸ The Gale Trilingual slab inscription (now in the National Museum in Colombo) set up by the Chinese captain, Cheng Ho in 1410 A.D. is inscribed in Persian, Tamil and Chinese. The document which contains lists of offerings to the deities of the Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims is clear evidence of the size and importance of the Muslim merchant community in Galle.

The Muslim merchants had obtained from the Sinhala rulers a very important privilege, to be tried by their own laws. If in any of the ports where they were engaged in trade, a dispute arose in which a Muslim merchant, mariner or vessel

was involved, it had to be settled without delay or expense by a tribunal consisting of Muslim priests, merchants and mariners. The proceedings had to conform to a maritime code of laws which were applicable to all Asian Muslims.²⁹ Obviously these traders to whom time meant money did not wish to get involved in elaborate and time consuming legal procedures, and hence obtained his concession from the ruler, who in a sense was beholden to them when the country was going through an economic transition from an exclusive rice growing economy to an export oriented one.

By the end of the thirteenth century a series of interconnected events which originated elsewhere had their repercussions in Sri Lanka resulting in intensifying existing links between the Sinhalese and Muslims. The South Indian invasions were partly responsible for the drift of the Sinhala kingdom to the South West and to the consequent growth of an export economy. This increased the dependence of the Sinhala rulers on the Muslims because trade now a national priority was in their hands. The Muslim invasions of South India as we have seen contributed to the rise of an independent kingdom of Jaffna, which was a Pandya feudatory to begin with. This had the same effect, for Jaffna too was very interested in the spice trade and there developed a Sinhala – Muslim alliance against Jaffna. Thirdly, the growth of the spice trade in South-East Asia to satisfy the European taste for oriental luxuries, with Arabs as carriers, strengthened their position and prestige in the island, abounding in spices. Fourthly, Islamic militarism had reached a high water mark in India under the Khaljis and Tuqluks and Sri Lanka was aware of the scale of Islamic arms and civilisation.

It is in this context that one has to view the diplomatic mission of Bhuvanekabahu I of Yapahuva (1273-1284) to the Mamluk court of Egypt led by Al-Haj-Abu Uthman in 1283.³⁰ This mission was very likely undertaken at the request of the Arab advisors of the king and was an attempt to restore the flagging economy and enhance the political prestige of the country by establishing direct relations with Egypt, which had by this time superseded Baghdad.

The king desired an Egyptian ambassador to be sent to Sri Lanka so that friendly relations could be maintained and also sent an open invitation to the merchants of the Sultan's dominions to trade in Sri Lanka. Among the numerous articles listed as marketable commodities were precious stones, pearls, elephants and cinnamon. It is clear from the king's letter that the mission was the result of a powerful Muslim lobby operating in the Sinhala court. The interests of the local rulers were closely integrated with those of the Muslims and hence the latter's advice was readily accepted. It is also possible that the trade mission was a cover to seek an alliance with the Muslim world to counter the constant threat of Hindu invasions from South India³¹.

The outcome of this mission is obscure. However, the links continued for some time, at least, for the coins belonging to the Bahri Mamluks of Cairo have been discovered between Colombo and Kandy and a number of them belong to Sultan Qalaun (1279-1290), who received the envoy of the Sinhala sovereign³².

This mission shows that the Muslims were specially requisitioned by the kings of Sri Lanka to perform various responsible tasks overseas, due no doubt to their loyalty, international linkages and navigational skills. Another such task executed by an eminent Muslim is recorded by Alexander Johnstone and Bertolacci³³ and is also embedded in popular tradition. This event relates to the coming of the Salagama community (referred to as Chaliyas by the Europeans) to Sri Lanka. It is generally held that certain castes like the *Karave*, *Durave* and *Salagama* originated from relatively recent migrations from India of professional groups of people, who in the course of time became absorbed into the Sinhala population. Alexander Johnstone records that he had in his possession a copper plate grant given by the king to "a great Mohammedan merchant" residing in Beruwala. There seems to be a confusion regarding the date of the grant and Johnstone thinks it was six to seven hundred years before his time which will be between

1100 and 1200 A.D. The merchant named Periya Mudali Marikkar of Gorakaduwa in Beruwala, had in deference to the king's wishes brought over from the village of Saliapattanam in South India a group of seven weavers. From these seven weavers the whole of the caste of *Chaliyas* is said to have sprung.

Although spinning and weaving were known and practised in Sri Lanka from ancient times the quantity of textiles produced was inadequate and the quality, inferior, when compared to the fine materials produced in South India and frequently imported to the island. The king was grateful to the merchant for the technical assistance that he had obtained for the country and rewarded him generously with lands, honours and privileges which remained in the same family for centuries till the time of Alexander Johnstone. The king decreed that all the descendants of Periya Mudali Marikkar will be relieved of the service of carrying palanquins for the Crown and that the dignity of the family should be maintained undiminished. On their application they will be allowed to erect mosques for their worship and any lands needed for the maintenance of the mosques will be granted. The descendants of the grantee will be allowed to carry on trade in any port and ship any merchandise.³⁴ It is interesting to note that the pre-eminence of the family was maintained and 600 years later his descendant was appointed native Superintendent of the Medical Department by Alexander Johnstone.

With the rise of the Ariya Cakravartis, it is apparent that there was intense rivalry between the rulers of the north and south for control over the pearl fisheries and the cinnamon trade which at this time was becoming a very lucrative venture with the rising demand in Europe for spices. The struggle that ensued appears to be one between the Muslim-supported Sinhala Kingdom and the Jaffna Kingdom for commercial prospects rather than a bid for political power.³⁵

At the time of Ibn Batuta's visit in 1344, the Jaffna king was economically and politically on the ascendant, having benefited from the dissension in the Sinhala kingdom. Ariya Cakravarti owned armed pirate vessels and a merchant marine which operated as far as Yemen.³⁶ He had secured control over the pearl fisheries, which strengthened his coffers for according to Marco Polo (1292) the pearls found in the Gulf of Mannar "are round and lustrous", beyond computation" and sought after all over the world. He adds that the king derives an immense revenue from the duty paid on this fishing, for the merchants pay him a tithe of their takings.³⁷ The rulers of Madura and Jaffna and the Sinhala ruler all had their eyes on this treasure. Ariya Cakravarti bartered the cinnamon sticks that were washed down to his coast for South Indian cloth and therefore he coveted the southern sea board where this precious commodity grew in abundance. He spoke fluent Persian and Batuta was struck by his drive and initiative. The Jaffna ruler had sufficient authority in the south to ensure his guest a safe journey to Adam's Peak.³⁸

Ariya Cakravarti's over enthusiastic hospitality to his Muslim guest could be attributed to many reasons. Firstly, the latter was the brother-in-law of the Sultan of Ma'bar who was a friend of Ariya Cakravarti. Secondly, it is likely that Ariya Cakravarti was trying to take advantage of Batuta's visit to open direct trade connections with West Asia circumventing the local Muslim intermediaries in the Sinhala kingdom. Perhaps the Sinhala king's overtures in 1284 to the Sultan of Egypt may have promoted Ariya Cakravarti to promote his own case.

There was acute competition between the Sinhala and Tamil rulers for the Arab market; the Sinhala king having the advantage of his association with the Muslim traders. Apart from the commercial rivalry, it is logical to assume that in view of the Hindu-Muslim conflict in the peninsula, the Muslims in Sri Lanka became the natural ally of the Sinhalese against the Hindu ruler of Jaffna who had affiliations with the Hindu powers of South India. Economics and politics therefore brought the Sinhalese and Muslims together. Ariya Cakravarti's intentions became apparent when he attacked Negombo and

Colombo in the reign of Vikramabahu III (1357-1374) and gained some control over the ports in the Western seaboard. Colombo at this time, according to the testimony of Ibn Batuta was the scene of flourishing Muslim commercial activity. The Arabs must have played a leading role in the defence of their settlements and provided the necessary naval support to their Sinhala allies and thereby enhanced their own power and status. It is likely that the Sinhala army hired Muslim soldiers. Marco Polo testifies that in his day (1292) the people of Ceylon employed Saracens when they needed the services of soldiers.³⁹ It appears that Ariya Cakravarti invaded the south, a second time in the reign of Bhuvanekabahu V (1372-1408), but both these attacks were successfully repulsed.

The spread of Vijayanagar power in South India around 1360 to 1370 and the consolidation of the kingdom of Kotte under Parakramabahu VI (1412-1416) led to a corresponding decline in the power and influence of Ariya Chakravarti. The Jaffna ruler, who could not resist the power of his mighty northern neighbour, had to recognise Vijayangar claims for overlordship and tribute. The political eclipse of their commercial rival left the trade of the rest of the island completely in Muslim hands and this domination was achieved peacefully.

By this time another change had taken place in the subcontinent. With the decline of the Caliphate of Baghdad in the second half of the 13th century, Arab commercial activity in the Indian Ocean slackened. Arab seamen still frequented the western half of the Indian Ocean, but their trade in the Eastern half passed entirely into the hands of Indian Muslims from Gujarat, Malabar, Coromandel up to Bengal. The Hindu merchants were largely based on land and exported their merchandise in Muslim owned vessels.

Owing to the gradual crystallisation of socio-religious caste taboos, foreign travel was shunned by high caste Hindus. If they did travel, they had to perform elaborate purification ceremonies to regain their social status in the caste hierarchy. Even social contact with Muslims and later Europeans and

travel in foreign owned vessels contaminated the high caste Hindu and made him ritually unclean. The egalitarianism of Islam attracted converts specially from the lower rungs of the caste-ridden Hindu society and the original Arab settlements were strengthened.

Sea-faring merchants seldom travel with their families and least of all Muslims who had rigid ideas about seclusion of women. So they acquired wives from among the local women who together with their offspring, invariably embraced Islam, adding further to the numerical strength and cohesion of the settlement. The converts provided a local base, support and manpower to the Arabs, while the former benefited socially and materially. In these manner colonies of Islamised Indians occupying the ports in the Western and Southern coast of India began to replace the older generation of traders operating from West Asia.

Thriving centres of Muslim commercial activity with relations extending as far as Tripoli and Morocco studded the Indian coastline without ever having to employ militant methods. Money could easily purchase influence in political circles and hence the local Hindu Rajas were very well disposed towards the traders and gave them special protection. After all the traders provided all that they needed and gave them the best price for the country's produce. As it happened in Sri Lanka the Rajas made use of the seafaring habits and navigational skills of the Muslim traders. Special mention should be made of the Zamorin of Calicut whose support was solicited by Sri Lanka, through Muslim intermediaries, against the Portuguese, a common enemy. The naval forces of the Zamorin were under Muslim command and it was with their help that the Zamorin succeeded in vanquishing his rivals⁴⁰.

Through them the Zamorin was in close connection with the rulers of Egypt, Persia and the Northern Indian Sultanates. Kayalpattanam was another flourishing centre of Muslim trade where an Arab chief had a local agency, through which he supplied annually, 10,000 horses to the king of Pandya.

In such situation the ruler did not raise serious objections to peaceful proselytation and also did not seek to extend state authority over the Muslims. Because of their economic and religious exclusiveness, the Muslim communities developed independently, had their own organisation and followed their own laws and customs. In this non-violent manner the Muslims spread their trade and creed. This development is relevant to our study because in the course of time colonies of such Indo-Arabs emerged along the coasts of Sri Lanka and the same structure and relationship were reproduced though on a much smaller scale.

The growth of Indian Muslim trading settlements in the opposite coast numerically strengthened the Muslim colonies in Sri Lanka, while the decline of the Tamil power in the north at the beginning of the 15th century left them without rivals. Their older settlements in Colombo and Galle grew in importance and new ones emerged in the coastal towns. Fernao de Queyroz, the Portuguese historian complains that the Muslims were arriving at the rate of five to six hundred a year and that they were penetrating to the interior as well.⁴¹ These immigrants were no longer exclusively Arab but Indian Muslims from the opposite coast who were well entrenched in the ports. As a result the Indo-Sri Lanka trade passed into the hands of the new generation of Indo-Arabs who had a double domicile spending their time between the ports of Sri Lanka and of South India. Dutch and early British records refer to them as “Coast Moors” as opposed to the “Ceylon Moors” who were the descendants of the early Arab colonists who inter-married Sinhala and Tamil women and settled permanently in this country. Just as the early Arab settlers maintained cultural contact with Islamic centres in West Asia, the Indo-Arab settlers of Sri Lanka looked towards their co-religionists across the Gulf of Manner for spiritual inspiration. Geographical proximity, commercial interests and the use of a common language Tamil, have strengthened the links that continue till modern times.

The dual origin of the Muslims of Sri Lanka is preserved in their traditions relating to their ancestry. One of these is recorded by Alexander Johnstone⁴² who gathered the information from learned Muslims of his time. According to this tradition the earliest settlers, belonging to the house of Hashim came to Sri Lanka from Arabia in the eighth century fleeing from the tyranny of the Caliph, Abd-al-melek-ben Merwan. They proceeded southwards from the Euphrates and established their first settlements in Konkan, Sri Lanka and Malacca. The group that came to Sri Lanka made eighth settlements along the north-east, north and western coasts of the island, namely at Trincomalee, Jaffna, Mantota, Mannar, Kudiramalai, Puttalam, Colombo, Beruwala and Galle. The Muslims would have enshrined this tradition in their memory, because they could with justifiable pride claim kinship with the Holy Prophet. It is a characteristic feature of historical legends to make a dramatic event out of gradual process. In this respect we could cite the colonisation of Sri Lanka by Vijaya which was the result of the enthusiastic chronicler's attempt to create a spectacular event of what may well have been a series of minor migrations.⁴³ The Hashimite ancestry is again reminiscent of the attempts by the Sinhalese to claim a link with the Sakya clan, through Princess Bhadda Kaccana and thus establish kinship with the Buddha.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Muslims of Sri Lanka would certainly cherish the memory of their connection with the family of Hashim from whence sprung the Holy Prophet.

Referring to this tradition, Sri Ponnambalam Ramanathan⁴⁵ presents arguments to show that it is impossible to accept this version of a "wholesale Arab colonisation". Nevertheless, there is other evidence to show that there were at least some Arab merchants with families settled in Sri Lanka in the eighth century. Reference has already been made to the king of Sri Lanka who sent to the Caliph Al Wahid of Baghdad, the families of Arab who had died in Sri Lanka.

The other tradition is that which is referred to by Casie Chetty:⁴⁶ that the ancestors of the "Ceylon Moors" formed their first settlements in Kayalpattanam in the ninth century and that many years later in 1024, a colony from that town settled in

Beruwala. There is a belief current in South India and Sri Lanka that Beruwala is a colony of Kayal and that it is the oldest Muslim settlement in Sri Lanka. Ramanathan favours this tradition and adds “that emigrants consisted largely of a rough and ready set of bold Tamil converts”, but places the date of colonisation around 1350. According to him Muslims who came to Sri Lanka before 1350 such as Arabs, Egyptians, Abyssinians and other Africans may have come and gone as merchants, soldiers and tourists and comparatively few of them domiciled themselves in the island. He adds that the first permanent Muslims settlers came in 1350 and made Beruwala their home. Subsequently, there were other colonists who set forth from Kayalpattanam and strengthened the population of Beruwala and also settled in other places like Batticaloa and Puttalam. Finally Ramanathan concludes that on the grounds of language, history, customs and physical features the “Ceylon Moor” and “coast Moor” are “ethnologically Tamils”. This theory which was presented a century ago gave rise to bitter controversy, on the ground that it was an insidious attempt to deprive the Muslims of special representation in the Legislative Council of the day.

There is evidence to prove that there were Muslim settlers in Beruwala and other parts of the island long before 1350. J.C. Van Sanden, in his book entitled, *Sonahar*, written in 1926,⁴⁷ quotes an ancient Arabic document which was in the possession of one of the oldest Moor families in Beruwala in his day. According to this document in 604 A.D. two sons of the Royal family of Yemen arrived in Sri Lanka, one landed in Mannar and the other in Beruwala, where he settled down. There were a few Moors in Beruwala who traced their ancestry to him. Further, reference has already been made to Periya Mudali Marikkar, who was a permanent resident of Beruwala in c. 1200. These various traditions regarding the ancestry of the Moors are not necessarily contradictory, but merely represent different waves of migrations that took place over the centuries, the re-collections of which remained entrenched in the collective memories of the descendants of the migrants.

Referring to Ramanathan's conclusion regarding the origin of the Moors, E.B. Denham, in his Census Report of Ceylon (1911), writes as follows:- "Anyone who knows the Tamils and Moors will be aware of many distinctive characteristics of the Moormen, who in many ways bear little resemblance to the Tamil, They must of course be very closely intermixed, but the original Arab blood has left its mark upon the race, and their religion Mohammadanism, has served to emphasize certain differences. Physically, too, they present considerable contrasts and a careful anthropological examination would probably detect certain marked characteristics which would separate them from the Tamil population. Amongst the Moors in Colombo and Galle at the present day there must be a fairly considerable infusion of Sinhalese blood; the number of Sinhalese women married to or living with Moors is fairly large."

A map compiled in 150 A.D. from Cladius Ptolemy's Geography, predating the Mahavamsa by three centuries names the Daduru Oya as Soana Fluvius, the river of the Arabs, proving the antiquity of the Arab contact with Sri Lanka. They were among the various people who had trading settlements indicated by Ptolemy, the others being Persians and Abyssinians. A new dimension was added to these commercial activities with the advent of Islam, when traders of various races speaking Arabic, visited the island under the banner of Islam. It is very likely that a large number of pre-Islamic Arabs of Sri Lanka embraced the faith of their countrymen. It was seen that by the ninth and tenth centuries sizeable Arab colonies had developed along the coast. Since oceanic traders do not travel with their women, the immigrants were mainly men who inter-married local women both Sinhala and Tamil. The Arabs maintained their identity among predominantly non-Muslim populations by converting their spouses and offspring to Islam and also by maintaining religious and cultural intercourse with the Baghdad Caliphate. Their efforts in this direction were greatly facilitated as in South India, by the tolerance of the indigenous people and the magnanimity of their rulers. By the end of the 13th century with the decline of the Caliphate, Arab

activities in the Eastern half of the Indian Ocean diminished and the trade were as we have seen, Indianised, and Islamic influence began to emanate from India.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Indo-Arab with their base in South India took over the Indo-Sri Lanka trade and visited the island enjoying a dual domicile. During their sojourn in the island they acquired wives, till the winds were favourable, and set sail with their merchandise to the opposite coast. In these manner settlements of Indian Muslims emerged along the coast and judging from Portuguese records there was a steady influx of migrants some of them converted Hindus from the South Indian port settlements. The Ceylon Moor draws the distinction when he calls himself “Sonahar” and his co-religionist from South India Chammanakaran (Sampan-Malay for boat and Karan Tamil for men).⁴⁸

With the advent of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean at the beginning of the 16th century the influx of Moors from South India declined. It will be seen that the Muslim settlers along the coasts were forced to seek refuge in Kandyan territory and were settled in various parts by the Kandyan kings. This dislocation of the Moors from their original habitat and diffusion into the interior villages would certainly have resulted in more and mote intermarriages between the two groups of Moors and between them and the Sinhalese and Tamils. Thus though we cannot wholly accept Ramanathan’s conclusion that the Moors of Sri Lanak are “Ethnologically Tamils” there was a considerable admixture of blood, Arab, Sinhala, Sri Lankan Tamil, and South Indian. Despite the admixture that took place, and the manners and customs that were acquired, the individuality of the community was preserved on account of the cherished memory of its Arab origin and the emphasis that was placed on Islam as the base of its communal structure.

The Sinhalese seem to have made a distinction between the early Arab settlers and the later Muslim migrants from South India. Pandukabhaya (377-307 B.C.) set aside land in his capital of Anuradhapura for the use of the *Yonas*,⁴⁹ who were pre-Islamic Arab traders who visited the capital. The 15th

century Sinhala literary works known as *Sandesas* refer to *Yon Liya*⁵⁰ or Arab women.

Even more interesting in the *Niti Nighanduwa*⁵¹ (a nineteenth century compendium of Kandyan law, which embodies older traditions) says that foreigners who have migrated from countries where caste distinctions are not observed like *Kavisi* (Kaffirs), *Ja* (Malays) and *Yon* (Arabs), were placed very high in the social hierarchy of the Sinhalese. Also, place names like Yonveediya, Yongolla and Arab Lane are obviously areas where there were concentrations of Arabs. The etymology of the word *Yon* is often traced to *Yavana* which is used in Indian literature to designate the Ionian Greeks. Later *Yavana* came to indicate any foreigner from the north bringing new religious practices and hence the name was used for Arabs. The Ceylon Moors call themselves *Sonahar*, which is said to be derived from *Yavana*. However some scholars disagree with this and alternate derivations are suggested, e.g. from Arabic *Shuna* for ship or from *Sunni*, the sect to which most Ceylon Moors belong.

The Sinhalese call the Coast Moors *Hambankarayo* or boat men (from Malay, *Champan* for boat and Sinhalese, *Karayo*, meaning men). For instance, Hambantota is the port where the coasting vessels are harboured. The differentiation between the Coast Moors and Ceylon Moors was extended even to the names of the localities in which these two groups of Moors lived such as Hambanveediya and Yonveediya. However, the Sinhalese aware that both groups came from overseas in sailing vessels call them indiscriminately *Marakkala minissu* (Tamil, *maran*-wood and *kala*-vessel) or sailors.

It is clear from the foregoing that a cordial and mutually beneficent relationship had developed between the Sinhalese and the Muslims, but one episode seems to suggest the contrary.⁵² This, though not very well known is popularly current in local tradition. The king who last reigned in Kurunegala, Vijayabahu V (1335-1341), left besides a son by his queen consort, another by a secondary wife, who was a

Muslim. The king died while his lawful heir was a minor and the other son Vathimi Kumaraya won over the ministers by literally bestowing riches which were at his command and thus claimed by throne.

The lawful heir retired from the capital and lived in disguise. Vathimi continued to reign for some time and gained popularity, but his partiality towards Islam offended the Buddhist ministers. They inveigled him to the summit of a rock under the pretext of participating in a religious ceremony. Unaware of the treacherous designs, the king ascended the rock and according to prior arrangement he was pushed down to his death by a gang of ruffians. His half brother was brought from his hiding and installed on the throne after which he abandoned Kurunegala and established his capital at Dambadeniya. It is said that a small mound was raised at the spot where Vathimi lost his life and to this day he is deified as Gale Bandara Deyyo.

On closer examination of this event it becomes clear that Vathimi was not assassinated just because he was a Muslim. Even if he was a Buddhist he would have met with the same fate sooner or later. According to the law of succession in Sri Lanka, it was imperative that the heir to throne should be the son of the consecrated queen, who had to be of royal blood. Sons of secondary wives of the king were not eligible for kingship. For instance, Kasyapa I of Sigiriya (473-491) was considered as usurper because his mother was not the queen.⁵³ Even though a Buddhist, he met the same fate as Vathimi at the hands of his half brother Moggallan (491-508). Further, it was a long established custom that the king of Sri Lanka had to be a Buddhist. Rajasinha I of Sitavaka (1581-1592) and Dharmapala of Kotte (1551-1597), lost all popular support when the former embraced Saivism and the latter, Roman Catholicism. Hence the assassination of Vathimi was not an act of hostility against Islam, but an attempt to preserve established usages, although the tradition upholds that Vathimi paid the price for his Islamic learnings.

There is one recorded instance of a Muslim invasion of Sri Lanka which took place in the reign of Dharma Parakramabahu IX of Kotte (1489-1513), just before the arrival of the Portuguese. According to the *Rajavaliya* version this appeared to be a plundering raid by a strong band of pirates rather than an attempt at territorial aggrandisement. The *Rajavaliya*,⁵⁴ an eighteenth century historical work mentions that the Kotte kingdom was seriously threatened by some invaders called Yongolla (or Arabs) from Kayalpattanam, headed by a pirate named Kadirayana. He came with a big fleet of ships and a large army, disembarked in the bay of Chilaw and fished for pearls and captured elephants. Obviously, this was not a bid for political supremacy, but a challenge to the authority of the king, since both elephants and pearls were royal monopolies. The invaders were repelled; their vessels destroyed and 89 were taken captive by the king's brothers of his orders. Francois Valentijn writing in 1726 corroborates the *Rajavaliya* account regarding this attack.⁵⁵

When Vasco de Gama rounded the Cape the Muslims were undisputed masters of the Indian Ocean and their long established trade routes bound the Muslim world and the Far-East in a web of mutually profitable and largely peaceful commerce. The Indo-Sri Lanka trade was in their hands and they were seen not only in the island's sea ports but had sent caravans to buy and sell to all the nooks and corners in the interior. Odoardo Barbarosa a Portuguese sea captain, of the early sixteenth century describes vividly the flourishing condition of the Muslims in the island's ports. He speaks of that "grandest and most lovely island, which Syria call Zeilam, but the Indians, Tenarisim, or the land of delights". Its ports were crowded with Moors, who monopolised commerce, and its inhabitants whose complexions were fair and their stature robust and stately, were altogether devoted to pleasure and indifferent to arms.

Barbarosa appears to have associated chiefly with the Moors, whose character and customs he describes almost as they exist at the present day. He speaks of their heads, covered with the finest handkerchiefs; of their ear-rings, so heavy with

jewels that they hang down to their shoulders; of the upper parts of their bodies exposed, but the lower portions enveloped in silks and rich cloths, secured by an embroidered girdle. He describes their language as a mixture of Arabic and Malabar, and states that numbers of their co-religionists from the Indian coast resorted constantly to Ceylon, and established themselves there as traders, attracted by the delights of the climate, and the luxury and abundance of the island, but above all by the unlimited freedom which they enjoyed under its government. The duration of life was longer in Ceylon than in any country of India. With a profusion of fruits of every kind, and of animals fit for food, grain alone was deficient; rice was largely imported from the Coromandel Coast, and sugar from Bengal.⁵⁶

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Muslim community appeared so prosperous that Emerson Tennent suspected that had it not been for the timely appearance of a Christian power in the island, Sri Lanka, instead of being a possession of the British crown might have been a Mohammedan kingdom under the rule of some Arab adventurer.⁵⁷

NOTES

1. S.A. Iman, "Ceylon Arab Relations" in *Moors Islamic Cultural Home Souvenir* 1944-65, pp. 10-13.
2. For details see, Sirima Kiribamune, "Muslims and trade of the Arabian Sea with special reference to Sri Lanka from the birth of Islam to the fifteenth century" in *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, (ed) M.A.M.Shukri, Colombo, 1986, pp.89-112. Also *University of Ceylon History of Ceylon*, Vol.1, Part 11, Colombo, 1960 pp. 703-712.
3. The inhabitants of Mauritania or Morocco were known as Mauri in ancient history. They were Islamised in the seventh century and later overran the Iberian Peninsula. The Spanish called them Moro and the Portuguese, Mouro since this was their first contact with Muslims, the Portuguese, when they entered the Eastern seas described all Muslims they met irrespective of race as Mouros, simply because like Mouros of Morocco they believed in Islam. From the Portuguese the term passed to the Dutch and British as being synonymous with Muslim.
4. S.A. Iman, *op.cit* p. 10.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. Sirima Kiribamune, *op. cit.*, p.96. For details of the finds see The Catalogue of the exhibition of ancient imported ceramics found in Sri Lanka's archaeological sites organised for the National Archaeological Congress, 1986. Prepared by W.Wijayapala and M.E. Prickett.
8. Colombo Museum, Reg. No.24, 157,238,20. *Archaeological Survey of the Ceylon Annual Report* 1918-19, Page B. Also see M.I.C.H. Souvenir 1944-65, pp. 31-38 "Archaeological

evidence of early Arabs in Ceylon” by Mohamed Sameer Bin Hajie Ismail Effendi.

9. *Ibid.* Also see *M.I.C.H. Souvenir* III. 1970-76, pp. 46 – 48 “Recent Archaeological finds”.
10. Sir Alexander Johnstone was the second Chief Justice of Sri Lanka from 1806 to 1807 and 1811 to 1819 and President of His Majesty’s Council of Ceylon. He took a keen interest regarding the people of Sri Lanka and he has sent a letter to the Secretary of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland regarding an Arabic Inscription found in Colombo. This letter is published in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, London 1824, pp. 537-548. All references to Sir Alexander Johnstone’s researches mentioned in this chapter are taken from this article.
11. There is a view that the inscription in the Colombo Museum is not the one mentioned by Johnstone. See Somasiri Devendra, “New Light on some Arabic Lithic Records in Sri Lanka”, in *Sri Lanka and the Silk Road of Sea*, Colombo, 1990.
12. *U.H.C.*, Vol. Part 1, p. 706.
13. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, translated by R.E. Lathom. Penguin Books, 1958, p. 231.
14. *The Rehla of Ibn Batuta*, Translation and commentary by Mahdi Husain, Baroda, 1953, p.219.
15. Marco Polo, p. 257.
16. *Ceylon*, Sir James Emerson Tennent, p. 540; Ibn Batuta (p.220) testifies that the more valuable gems are reserved for the king.
17. Ibn. Batuta, p. 219.
18. *Ibid.*

19. Ibn Batuta. Appendix D. pp. 247-8.
20. *Ibid.* Ibn Batuta reports that the shrine of this mystic and saint was held in great veneration in Shiraz.

The people come morning and evening and got blessed by touching his grave.
21. Ibn Batuta, p. 219.
22. Ibn Batuta, pp. 219-221.
23. Ibn Batuta, p. 222.
24. *Ceylon Journal of Science*, Section C, Vol. 11, Part 1, p.20.
25. Alexander Johnstone, *R.A.S. of Great Britian and Ireland*, Vol. 1, Part 1.
26. *M.I.C.H. Souvenir* 111, p. 46.
27. Ibn Batuta, pp. 223-224.
28. Quoted by H.W. Codrington in *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, Colombo, 1924, p. 157.
29. Alexander Johnstone. *Op. Cit.*
30. H.W. Cordington, "A Sinhalese Embassy to Egypt", in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (Ceylon Branch), Vol. XXVIII, No. 72, 1919, pp. 82-84; Also see V.L.B. Mendis, *Foreign Relations of Sri Lanka from earliest times to 1965*, Sri Lanka, 1983, p. 187; *U.H.C.*, Vol. 1, Part II, p. 707.
31. V.L.B. Mendis, *Currents of Asian History*, Colombo, 1981. p. 423.
32. H.W.Codrington, *Ceylon Coins and Currency*, Colombo 1924, pp. 158-9.

33. *J.R.A.S. of Great Britian and Ireland*, Vol. 1. Part 1, p. 547.
Also A Bertolacci, *Agricultural Commercial and Financial Interest of Ceylon*, 1817, pp. 43-44. J.C. Van Sanden, Sonahar, *A Brief History of the Moors of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1926, pp. 43-44. Regarding the arrival of the Salagama caste see. E.W. Perera, *Sinhalese Banners & Standards*, Colombo, 1916, p. 20, Plate 11, Fig 2, gives the *Salagama* Flag. depicting the landing of the weavers.
34. Paul E. Pieris, *Ceylon the Portuguese Era*, Vol. II, Sri Lanka, 1983, pp. 218-219.
35. V.L.B. Mendis, *Foreign Relations of Sri Lanka, From earliest times till 1965*, Sri Lanka, 1983, p. 184.
36. Ibn Batuta, pp. 217-218.
37. *The Travels of Marco Polo*, pp. 233-234.
38. Ibn Batuta, p. 218.
39. Marco Polo, p. 232.
40. K.M. Panikkar, *Malabar and the Portuguese*, Bombay, 1929.
41. Fernao de Queyroz, *The Temporal and Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, p. 742.
42. *J.R.A.S of Great Britian and Ireland*, Vol. 1, Part 1.
43. *The Mahavamsa, A Great Chronicle of Ceylon*, translated into English by Wilhelm Geiger, P.T.S. 1934, chap. VI.
44. *The Mahavamsa*, VIII, verses 20-28.
45. Hon. P.Ramanathan, "The Ethnology of the Ceylon Moor" in *J.R.A.S.C.B.* Vol. X, No. 36, 1888, pp. 234-262.
46. Casie Chetty, *The Ceylon Gazetteer*.

47. J.C. Van Sanden. *Sonahar: A Brief History of the Moors of Ceylon*, Colombo, 1926, pp. 117-118.
48. J.C. Van Sanden, *op. cit.* pp. 119-122.
49. *Mahavamsa*, X, 90.
50. *Kolila Sandesaya*, ed. Gunawardhana, v. 74 and *Gira Sandesa Vivaranaya* ed. Kumaranatunge v. 104.
51. *Niti Nighanduva, The Vocabulary of Law*, translated by C.J.R.Le Mesurier and T.B. Panabokke, Colombo, 1880. p.20.
52. J.C.Van Sanden, *op.cit* pp.21-22; Simon Casie Chetty Mudliyar – *The Ceylon Gazetteer, Ceylon* 1934, pp. 146-149.
53. *Culavamsa*, 38.80.
54. *The Rajavaliya*, translated by B.Gunasekera, Ceylon, 1954, pp.61-62.
55. *Francois Valentijn's Description of Ceylon* translated and edited by Sinnappah Arasaratnam, London, 1975,p.230. also see G.P.V. Somaratne, *The Political History of the Kingdom of Kotte*, Ceylon, 1975, pp. 167-168.
56. Emerson Tennent. P. 541.
57. *Ibid.*

III. THE CROSS MEETS THE CRESCENT: Penetration into the Interior 1505-1796 A.D.

The Portuguese -1505-1658

“I quite understand the pain our arrival will give to the Moors; but as the sword which you see in my hand is one which I have often seen stained with their blood, I do not consider it a novelty to die, since our conquests in general are more against them than against the heathen, who are excused by their ignorance, while the Moors are condemned by their malice”.

Lopo Soarez Albergaria (1516)

Quoted by Queyroz.

With the arrival of Vasco da Gama in the Eastern waters the entire scenario changes and the undisputed Arab control of the coasts and waters of the Indian Ocean passed into Portuguese hands. Although the breakthrough of 1498 was the culmination of almost a century of Portuguese national ventures, it has been revealed that Vasco da Gama's ship succeeded in reaching Calicut from East Africa because its navigator was an Arab sea-farer named Ahmed Ibn Majeed whose manuscript work entitled, “Book of Uses,” giving sailing directions in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean has been discovered in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, (Quoted by Grigori Bondarevsky, *Muslims and the West*, Delhi, 1985, Page ii). In the final part of his work the Arab navigator bitterly regretted the fact that he had shown the Portuguese predators the sea route to India for with astonishing speed and complete ruthlessness they had forcefully broken down the trade that had peacefully developed. They did not aim at territorial conquests but control of the main routes in the East which they secured by establishing their power at three key points, namely Ormuz, Goa and Malacca. These were to serve as naval bases and commercial entrepôts. Soon after, several

fortified trading posts and unfortified settlements emerged in between.

From the earliest phase Arab ships were attacked as a matter of course and driven from their own waters. The ancient Arab links with India and Sri Lanka were completely served. Even the Indo-Sri Lanka trade had to steal surreptitiously from creek to creek. Having thus with ruthless aggression destroyed the unarmed Muslim monopoly, the Portuguese enforced a monopoly system of their own. Trade in certain items, specially spices and certain ports were declared monopolies of the Crown of Portugal. Asian ships could sail the seas provided a Portuguese licence was obtained on payment, and custom duties were paid on specified merchandise at certain specified ports.¹ The effect of this policy on Muslim trade and Muslim colonies in Sri Lanka as elsewhere was ruinous.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how the policies of the Portuguese and then the Dutch threw the Sinhalese and Muslims together a common enemy, thus strengthening an already existing relationship of mutual interdependence and thereby accelerating the process of Sri Lankanisation of the Muslims.

When the Portuguese first made their appearance, the coastline of Sri Lanka in common with Gujerat, Malabar, Coramandel and Bengal were thriving centres of Muslim maritime activity, with sizeable Muslim populations whose interests were strongly integrated with those of the local rulers. In Sri Lanka there were substantial settlements at Puttalam, Chilaw, Madampe, Negombo, Colombo, Kalutara, Beruwala, Maggona, Paiyagala, Alutgama, Bentota, Galle, Weligama and Matara. At the port towns of Chilaw, Negombo and Kalutara, the Moor communities were very influential having their own headmen (1614) and at Alutgama, the community had three headmen. At Negombo and Weligama they had their own streets, while in Matara their settlements were in the bazaar areas. In Colombo the present day New Moor Street and Old Moor Street indicate a strong concentration of Moors in those places for many centuries.²

Father Fenao de Queyroz who shared with his countrymen and intense dislike for the Muslims complains "They entered Ceylon by trade and by money and they multiplied there to such an extent both by generation and continuation of commerce for there came 500-600 each year that not only in the maritime ports but even inland, there were already villages of them in all the Dissawas. In the ports of Mature (Matara) there were many. From Safragao (Sabaragamuva) to Calatura (Kalutara) within a distance of 4 leagues there was a village belonging to Manoel do Melo altogether peopled by Moors and already they used to call it the village of the Moors and there was a cassis (Muslim divine) to teach them and propagate their sect among the Chingalez. One league before Alicao (Alutgama) there was a large village of Berbirim (Beruwala) which deserves to be called Barbary for was altogether peopled by them."³

It is clear that at this time there were scattered communities of Moors wielding influence in their place of residence. They had won the confidence of the rulers who were beholden to them in many ways. They supplied the court and the nobles with foreign luxuries and gave the best price for the country's produce while the custom duty they paid enriched the treasury. Hence they were given considerable independence in the management of their own affairs. It was seen that disputes which rose in the ports regarding shipping and maritime commerce were settled by their own tribunal. Similarly the Moors followed their own laws regarding marriage and inheritance.⁴ Despite the free hand they had in the management of their own affairs they never cherished political ambitions.

The Sinhala and Tamil women whom the Muslims married and their children were invariably converted to the Islamic faith. However, it is unlikely that they attempted any large scale proselytization among the Sinhalese for such an act would certainly have aroused resentment against them. Queyroz says that Qazis were called to propagate Islam among the Sinhalese but it would be unfair to rely entirely on Portuguese or Dutch accounts because they were the bitterest enemies of the Muslims. When the trading colonies grew rich and

influential they were given lands and granted permission to build mosques by the local rulers. They then sent for *mullahs* or religious teacher, first from West Asia and later from South India and thus preserved their cohesion and integrity as a separate group.

Although the Sinhalese are known to have sailed as far as China in their own vessels and Parakrama Bahu I (1153-1186) undertook an expedition against Burma in defence of Sri Lanka's trading interests, the Sinhalese were never a sea faring people. The island's strategic position, the variety of its products, the hospitality of its king and people attracted traders to her shores and it developed as an entreport where merchants from the East and West met. This in turn acted as a disincentive to the inhabitants and as a result the Sinhalese developed little inclination for overseas commercial ventures.

The Muslims with their traditional business acumen, international contacts, seafaring habits and all the technical skills associated with it, supplemented the needs of a peasant society. Emerson Tennent remarks, "They (Muslims) were dealers in jewelry, connoisseurs in gems, and collectors of pearls; and while the contented and apathetic Singhalese in the villages and forests of the interior passed their lives in the cultivation of their rice lands, and sought no other excitement than the pomp and ceremonial of their temples; the busy and ambitious Mohametans on the coast built their warehouses at the ports, and crowded the harbours with their shipping, and collected the wealth and luxuries of the island, its precious stones, its dye-wood, its spices and ivory to be forwarded to China and the Persian Gulf".⁵

The unexpected arrival of the Portuguese in the island dealt the death blow to the peaceful exchanges of commodities. In the spheres of religion, politics and commerce the Portuguese and Muslims were rivals and the latter sensed that their period of unrivalled trade supremacy was over. They had heard of the atrocities committed by the Portuguese on their co-religionists in East Africa and India and they realised what would follow. The lust for gold and love of God had driven the

Portuguese to pursue a vigorous attempt at eliminating the Muslims from Eastern seas. In Sri Lanka, the Portuguese found that the only obstacle to their achieving a monopoly of the profitable cinnamon trade was the presence of the Muslims, since the Sinhalese played no part in the export trade.

When Don Lourenco de Almeida son of the first Portuguese Viceroy of Goa appeared of Colombo in 1505, there were a number of Muslim ships anchored in the harbor loading and unloading cargo. Realising the gravity of the situation they acted quickly and instigated the citizens of Colombo to take action against the intruder. The Muslims strongly opposed the setting up of a Portuguese factory, for this, unlike their own warehouses, was an armed stronghold of the King of Portugal. They managed to arouse so much of hostility that it was dismantled.

In 1518 Lopo Soarez de Albergaria came with orders from the King of Portugal to erect a fort in Sri Lanka. The Muslims prevailed upon all sections of Sinhala society and did their utmost to prevent the construction. They warned the King of Kotte that his sovereignty would soon be diluted for the sole objective of the Portuguese was territorial aggrandisement. They reminded the court and the nobility of their own good services to the country, of the wealth and prosperity they had brought it, of their unswerving loyalty to the crown and that they had never attempted to impose their religious views on anyone else. The Sangha was forewarned of the potential threat to the national religion, for the extermination of other faiths was the foundation of Portuguese rule. The Muslims instigated the people and tried to prevent them from supplying provisions to the Portuguese. Firearms were supplied and the ships were attacked but the fortalice was erected in defiance of the Muslims. The King of Kotte, aided by the Muslims and the Malabar forces of the Zamorin of Calicut made repeated attempts to oust the intruders but met with little success.

Meanwhile in 1521, the kingdom of Kotte was partitioned among three brothers. The eldest Bhuvaneka Bahu (1521-1551), received Kotte and the seaboard to rule with the title of Emperor. The youngest was given Sitavaka, the Four Korales and Denavaka, with the title of King of Sitavaka and he took the name of Mayadunne (1521-1581). The other Madduma Bandara, was given the principality of Raigama and was therefore known as Raigama Bandara.

In the meantime, the Portuguese realising how bitterly the Sinhalese resented the presence of the fortress, demolished it and retained only the factory which was quite adequate for their commercial needs. Meanwhile, a fraternal struggle broke out and Bhuvaneka Bahu afraid of his ambitious brother Mayadunne, sought Portuguese help. Seizing the opportunity to take revenge, the Portuguese persuaded Bhuvaneka Bahu to expel the Moors from Colombo. They sought refuge in the Sitavaka Kingdom and rallied round Maydunne, now confirmed a nationalist leader aided by the Muslims, and Bhuvaneka Bahu, branded as a Portuguese vassal. Acting on the advice of the Muslim refugees in his court. Mayadunne, sent an embassy to the Zamorin of Calicut requesting assistance in the war against his brother promising in return to deliver a few of the island's seaports to him. This offer was in keeping with the Zamorin's design and he promptly despatched two distinguished Moors of Cochin, Pachi Marikkar and Cunhale Marikkar and a third Ali Ibrahim together with forces to help Mayadunne.⁷ Each time the combined armies besieged Kotte, reinforcements would arrive from Goa and Mayadunne was forced to withdraw. Ultimately he was forced to sue for peace. The Portuguese demanded the heads of the three Muslim generals as a pre-condition for any negotiations. The foul deed of gross ingratitude was done and never again did the Zamorin extend his helping hand.

Mayadunne's relationships with his brother wavered between aggression and reconciliation; but against the Portuguese he and later his warlike son Rajasinha (1582-92) carried on relentless warfare. Meanwhile Bhuvaneka Bahu took the unusual step of appointing his grandson, Dharmapala, as

heir to the kingdom of Kotte under the protection of the King of Portugal (1543) thus eliminating the possibility of Mayadunne succeeding him. Dharmapala (1551-97) embraced Roman Catholicism taking the name of Don Juan, ruled as a vassal of the King of Portugal and when he died bequeathed the kingdom of Kotte to his Portuguese overlord. With the death of Rajasinha, the Sitavaka kingdom which had valiantly resisted the Portuguese onslaught for over half century collapsed. However, the Portuguese were faced with an inveterate enemy when Vimala Dharma Suriya I (1592-1604) ascended the throne of Kandy, which was now the sole surviving indigenous kingdom left to bear the brunt of the struggle against the foreigner.

The expulsion of the Moors from Colombo meant that considerable numbers took refuge in the Sitavaka kingdom. Many traders moved away from Colombo and settled in other port towns on the Western coast like Negombo, Puttalam, Beruwala and Alutgama, some of which were within Sitavaka territory. The Muslims helped Mayadunne and later his son Rajasinha (1582-1592) in many ways. They fought in the battles against the Portuguese; were employed as envoys to secure assistance from the rulers of Calicut and also served as gunmen who were lacking in the Sinhala army. Queyroz bitterly complains that all the revolts the Muslims were always on the side of the enemy.⁸

In 1613 the Portuguese Captain General Don Jeronimo de Azevedo issued a decree preventing the further immigration of Muslims to Kotte, followed by order in 1622, 1623, 1624 and 1626 to the same effect. As could be expected these orders were not effectively implemented because very often the Moors bribed the officials and circumvented the laws. It was noticed that in one instance the expulsion orders were overlooked because the Moors supplied the General with 900 amunams of areca nuts annually.⁹ There were Moors appointed as *Vidanes and Kanakapulles* over their villages in Portuguese territory.¹⁰ Even the threat of ex-communication by the Provincial Council at Goa did not always deter the Portuguese officials from

appointing Moors to positions which gave them authority over Christians.¹¹

There are numerous instances where the Moors took advantage of the avarice and corruption of the Portuguese officials not merely to remain in the maritime provinces and furtively continue their trade but to rise to places of importance and wield influence in society. The priests found the presence of the Moors a hindrance to conversion, for the Sinhalese argued that it was better to become a Muslim than to become a Christian, because the Moors were treated with great respect, entertained in the houses of the Portuguese and even appointed as headmen of main villages.¹² This was obviously an argument put forward by the Sinhalese who did not wish to become either.

Queyroz records the instance of one Muslim tailor, Belala, who after a residence of 30 years in Colombo had amassed a fortune (1625). When urged to become a Christian he replied that his status among the Portuguese was higher as a Muslim than as a Christian! When his daughter married another Moor many Portuguese joined the celebrations and assisted him in all the decorations. One Portuguese *casado* even sent his Kaffir slave to slaughter cattle for the wedding feast according to Muslim rites. Both the state and Church ordered the *casado* to be punished after an inquiry was held and no punishment was ever meted.¹³

Apart from such malpractices among the Portuguese officialdom, there were instances where the Muslims were tolerated because they were at times indispensable. Although the Portuguese galleons were better built and better armed than those of the Muslims, the latter were masters of the Indian Ocean. They carried nautical instructions called *rahmains* which contained information about winds, coasts, reefs in fact everything which a sea captain should know. They even had sailing directions called *suwar* which they constantly studied and followed with implicit confidence.¹⁴ Emerson Tennent had seen these charts copied from ancient originals in the hands of Maldivian sailors who came to Sri Lanka in his time.¹⁵ As far

back as the eleventh century they had learnt the use of the mariners compass from the Chinese. The Portuguese needed the knowledge of the Muslims in navigation "In Ceylon however, there was a special reason to keep, not all, but some of them, because as the Chingalez were ever seafarers, there could be no sailing or trade, if there were no Moorish lascars for that work".¹⁶

A distinction has to be drawn between Portuguese policy and social attitude towards the followers of other faiths. Even in Goa Albuquerque had to abandon his original plan of forcibly opposing Muslims everywhere, because he could not do without them in certain circumstances, specially when it came to shipping.¹⁷ The Sinhala residents of Galle, Alutgama and Negombo petitioned to the Portuguese saying that the Moors enriched the areas in which they lived and thus strengthened the Royal Exchequer and therefore should be allowed to remain.¹⁸

It is clear that some least of the Moors, due to their wealth, perspicacity and unique navigational skills, coupled with the corruption rampant among the Portuguese officials, managed to carry on a precarious existence in the maritime provinces till Constantine de Sade Noronha set his shoulder to the task of completely exterminating them. "He arranged matters like a prudent man, gave orders like a good Catholic and carried them out like a courageous man. And with god's help and his zeal, the result was better than was expected."¹⁹ The cumulative effect of de Sa's competence and loyalty was the gradual infiltration of coastal trading community into the heart of the Kandyan kingdom, which at this time was under the hegemony of Senarat (1604-1635), a successor of Vimala Dharma Suriya. This last bastion of independent Buddhism became a haven for the Muslims in their hour of distress, for it was the only place in the island where they could practice their religion without hindrance from King or Pope.

The influx of the coast dwelling Moors into the interior was welcomed by the king of Kandy for many reasons. The kingdom was denuded of man power after continuous wars and invasions and labour was needed for agricultural purposes. As traders they strengthened the economy of the hard-pressed kingdom. It was through them that the kings of Kandy learnt what was happening in the rest of the world. While rendering useful service, they never tried to arrogate political power on themselves, were respectful of state authority and sensitive to the susceptibilities of the Sinhalese. Hence in the face of Portuguese oppression they came not only as refugees but also as welcome invitees of the kings of Kandy. Queyroz testifies "The number of those expelled is not known for certain, but quite a multitude of them fled to Candea. The Candiot profiting by this occasion to win over our most declared enemies received many of them into his ports, whence owing to fresh negligence they were always known to be such bitter enemies in hatred and by profession; and in Batticaloa along the idolatrous King placed a garrison of 4000 of them, thus showing his mind by favouring our enemies."²⁰ "Senarat's objective in setting the Muslims in the fertile lands around Batticaloa, was to maintain food supplies during his campaigns. The King's far sighted policy which was mutually beneficial resulted in the quick recovery of the kingdom as is proved by the successes of his campaigns of 1628 and 1630."²¹ Even to this day the largest rural Muslims settlements are in the Batticaloa area and it is not a mere accident that these peasants are among the best rice growers in the country.

Even after the expulsion orders of de Sa there were considerable numbers of Moors in Matara and also in Aluthgama and Kalutara. They included refugees from the Maldives who had come hither when some of their islands were submerged.²² In the meantime the Dutch had captured the Galle fort (1640) and were so hard pressed for supplies that they ventures out and were attacked by the Portuguese. The Dutch then befriended 200-300 Muslims of Matara and requested their help to counter attack the Portuguese in return for money and favours. At this time some of the Muslims were living in the

Galle Fort, the plot was divulged by one of the Muslims. This enraged the Captain, Antonio de Amarod who was with his army in Matara so much, that he ordered his army to surround the bazaar, slew all the men, confiscated their property, and took the women and young children as captives to Colombo (1642).²³ The Matara massacre has been compared to the carnage at Goa in 1510 when the Portuguese Viceroy, Afonso de Albuquerque put all Muslim men to the sword and the women to bed.

As a result of this mass slaughter at Matara, many more Moors realising their plight to Kandy. Like his father, Rajasinha II (1635-1687) encouraged the Moors to settle permanently in his territory. According to popular tradition the king engaged the services of three Arab migrants to fight the enemy. After the successful conclusion of the battle, the grateful monarch invited the Arabs to remain in his country. The guests made a very natural request that they be given Kandyan women as wives. The king gave them every encouragement and apparently with royal connivance the Arabs kidnapped three young Kandyan women who were marching in a religious procession or *perahara*, and concealed them in the palace. The relatives of the girls complained to the king who advised them that since the Arabs had already held the girls by their hands it is best that they be given in marriage to the Arabs. The relatives consented. They took their wives and settled down in Akurana.²⁴ The present day Muslims of Akurana, who number 17% of the population cherish this tradition regarding the origin.

The influx of Muslims into the Kandyan Kingdom should be view in the wider perspective of the nature of the universal Muslim fraternity or the *Umma* in which bonds of race, caste and clan are submerged in the brotherhood of Islam. The Umma had a dual character; on the one had it was a political organism and at the same time it had a basically religious character; it was a religious community. "Politically the interpreters of the Law of Islam, the *Sharia*, have always been close to the centres of dynastic power: the formal separation of church and state was until recent times

inconceivable". Ideally therefore a Muslim has to live in an Islamic state.²⁵

The social impact of Islam is also equally strong. It is to be seen in such institutions as Koranic schools or *madrasas* and the existence of *waqfs* or charitable property trusts. The practice of Muslim children to this day, learning the Arabic language and memorising the Koran as a part of their primary education, is another example of a continuing vigorous Islamic tradition.

Since the Koran embraces not only politics and economics but also interpersonal relationships, worship and ritual, it permeates in totality the life of the believer and also regulates his day to day activities. The five obligations binding on him are simple and direct. A Muslim should often recite the *shahada* the central precept; pray five specific times of the day; abstain from food and sex between sunrise and sunset during the month of Ramadan; give any anonymously one fortieth of his fixed annual income as charity and make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his life time, if he can afford it, so as to maintain contact with other Muslims thus strengthening the concept of an Islamic brotherhood.

Coming from this background it was impossible for the Muslims to survive in Portuguese controlled territory. From 1540 onwards a large number of harsh and offensive laws were enacted for the express purpose of preventing the public practice of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam in the Portuguese controlled areas. Other laws were enacted the objective of favouring converts to Roman Catholicism at the expense of their compatriots who refused to be converted. Substantial tax concessions were given to Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims so as to induce conversion. For instance the *marala badda* was a tax levied by the Sinhalese kings on the value of the moveable property of a dead person. This was partially abolished by the Portuguese when they became heirs to the Kotte kingdom. If the heirs of the dead man embraced Roman Catholicism, the government relinquished its claim to the *marala badda*. Later further concessions were given to encourage conversion. They

permitted the male heirs to inherit the whole of the deceased's property if they became Christians within four months of death. If not any other surviving relative on being baptized could claim and inherit that property.²⁶ However, attractive these inducements were, the Muslims even more than the Buddhist and Hindus declined to barter God for gold.

The tenacity of the Muslims to their faith was not peculiar to Sri Lanka. "Then as now Christian converts in Muslim lands were very few and far between, being mainly limited to women living with Portuguese men and to the children of these (usually illicit) unions, to runaway slaves and social outcasts."²⁷

Although the Ecclesiastical Council of Goa (1576) laid down as a matter of policy that conversions must not be made by force or even threat of force, the later decisions of the Council nullified in practice the effects of this policy. A viceregal decree (4th December, 1576) enacted *inter alia*, "that all heathen temples in Portuguese controlled territory should be demolished; that the name of the Prophet Muhammed should not be invoked in the Muslim call for prayer from a mosque; that all non-Christian priests teachers and laymen should be expelled and that all their sacred books such as the Koran, should be seized and destroyed whenever found. Hindus and Buddhists were prohibited from visiting their respective temples in the neighbouring territories and even the transit passage of Asian pilgrims to such places was forbidden."²⁸ In addition, non-Christians were officially discriminated against and converts equally favoured when it came to remunerative employment.

Hindu and Buddhist temples and Muslim mosques were destroyed and Roman Catholic churches were built on or near the sites of the demolished mosques and temples and the lands belonging to the latter were transferred for the maintenance of the former.²⁹

These harsh measures, even if they did not force people to become Christians made it very difficult for them to be

anything else. The legislators of 1567 hoped that “the false heathen and Moorish religions” would wither and die in Portuguese controlled territory. However, the implementation of these laws varied with the time and place and circumstances and specially with the character of individual viceroys, archbishops and Captain Generals so that the full impact of these enactments was not continuously felt.

Since the Muslims stubbornly refused to accept conversion as a resolution to their problems, they had no other alternative but to emigrate to a more congenial environment where they could exercise their right to worship and this they found within the Kandyan Kingdom. To the Muslim emigrating for the protection of one’s belief is and act of religious merit in some cases even a religious duty.

The Dutch (1658-1796).

“Gold is you God”, the West African Negroes told the Dutch traders in Guinea the 17th century.³⁰

When the Dutch made their appearance in the East the religious policy they adopted was an extension of that which they followed at home. For 150 years after the triumph of Calvinism many civil disabilities were imposed on their Catholic countrymen who were suspected of having extra territorial loyalties towards Catholic neighbours.³¹ In the East the Hollanders found that their predecessors had left militant groups of Roman Catholics and further they had to reckon with well established indigenous faiths like Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. The Muslims in particular, were the victims of their hostility because they were trade rivals as well.

The Dutch had to face Muslim competition in Java, Sumatra, Moluccas, Celebes and this commercial rivalry influenced their attitude towards Muslims elsewhere, just as they did against Roman Catholicism, the Dutch prohibited the public adherence to Islamic rites; but soon realised as the Portuguese had done before them that their chances of converting Muslims to Christianity in any significant numbers

were very bleak. They therefore concentrated their efforts on the Roman Catholic, Hindus and Buddhists who live in the areas wrested from the Portuguese.

In the last few decades of the 17th century the Dutch relaxed their rigorous attitude towards Islam in their Indonesian possessions. The Church had to contend with the Heeren XVII who preferred more persuasive methods of conversion.³² In Sri Lanka however the tolerant policies were not followed till a century later, because the Dutch found the Muslims an ineradicable menace and a hindrance to their trade policies. To the trading company, economic considerations superseded everything else, and they were most disturbed to see the Muslims virtually controlling the inland trade of the country as well as the Indo-Sri Lanka trade. So they imposed more severe restrictions against the followers of Islam than they did against the Hindus and Buddhists.

These measures, however, were largely counterproductive as has been summed up by C.R.Boxer, "Whenever there was an active religious faith, such as Islam in Indonesia, Hinduism in India, Buddhism in Ceylon or Roman Catholicism in the places settled by the Portuguese, Calvinism could make no lasting impression once the state support for this creed was withdrawn. In fact the principal importance of Calvinism in the East was negative. Like the militant Roman Catholicism which proceeded and survived its challenge in the Monsoon area, the impact of Calvinism served chiefly to strengthen the hold and to extend the influence of Islam in the regions where the Cross and the Crescent met."

The object of the Dutch East India Company was commerce and to secure this and specially its monopoly they resorted to piracy on the high seas, was on land, entered into alliance with kings and princes, acquired territorial possessions and ruled over them like a private estate. The Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka were divided into three administrative units; the coastal strip extending from the Maha Oya to the Bentota river which comprised the Colombo commandment; the coastal strip from the Bentota river to the Valave Ganga which was the

Galle commandment and the Jaffna Commandment which included the Jaffna Peninsula and parts of the Vanni. The rest of the country belonged to the king of Kandy. In addition the Dutch imposed a control over the ports of Kalpitiya, Trincomalee, Kottiyar and Batticaloa in order to prevent the king from communicating with hostile nations. However they were willing to cede the ports to the King and occasionally allow the King to trade through these outlets, provided he was well disposed towards them.

The attitude of the Dutch towards the Moors is reflected in memoir of Ryckloff Van Goens (1663-1675) quite early in the company's career in Sri Lanka "Our experience shows in how great a degree the Moors in the island are in every respect a source of daily hindrance to us, being verily no other than a canker in the Company's profits and the chief perverters of the morals both of our own people and the natives. They are also the people who outside the Island, most betray our interests and place the greatest obstacles in our way."³³ Van Goens ordered that all the heads of Muslim families in the Galle Commandment to be registered and placed under the supervision of an able Dutch official. Those residing within the city of Galle were entered in a separate list together with their trade and means of livelihood. Those Muslims who were not inimical to the Company's interest and who could be used profitably, were tolerated, such as the poor Muslims residing between the Kalu Ganga and Valava Ganga engaged in cultivation and rendering compulsory service of paying dues to the Company, "But all those whose profession is to trade, scour the country, sail overseas with their goods, all these are in the highest degree harmful to us."³⁴ Evidently, it was the Muslims as trade rivals that the Company detested.

Van Goens makes a distinction between the Choliyars (Tamil Muslims from South India) whom he says are of "pirate descent" and the Hindustani and Bengali Moors who come mainly to barter rice for elephants and sail away having no desire to settle here. The wealthy merchants from North India who come in large vessels were encouraged because the transaction was favourable to the company. Elephants were

found in abundance in the scrub jungles in the South and because of its majestic appearance and intelligence, the Sri Lanka elephant was a very marketable commodity in Moghul court and in courts of Bijapur and Golkanda, where it was used for military and ceremonial purposes. However, the transportation of the cumbersome cargo posed a problem for the Company. For if by any chance a beast dies in transit the whole venture would be a loss.³⁵ Therefore, whoever, came to the doorstep and carried away the denizens of the jungle had to be encouraged. Further the great Muslim merchants brought rice, ghee oil and butter in exchange. Rice was short supply in the Dutch controlled areas, although there was sufficient grain in the Kandyan kingdom except during drought and invasions.

These merchants rendered such a useful service that the mosques built for them were not destroyed even at the request of the predikants. If due to the lack of facilities for worship these merchants stopped coming, the Company would be faced with an elephantine problem. So the decision was to keep the mosques and dispose of the elephants.

Steps were taken to prevent the arrival of Muslims in Colombo and Negombo as well. All vessels which arrived in the harbour bringing Muslims had to depart with the identical passengers so that no Muslims would seek to settle down. The names of 16 Muslims who were already resident in Colombo were listed so that they could be sent away if necessary. They were tailors, bakers and butchers whose service were necessary and hence they were given temporary resident visas. There were other areas too in which the Dutch found the Muslims useful. Van Goens himself suggested the erecting of a saw mill in Agalavatta operated by Muslims.

Regulations were introduced and implemented with ruthless vigour to oust the Muslims from peaceful exchange of commodities that they carried on. Preferential tariffs were introduced discriminating in favour of Burghers (Dutch colonists resident in the towns) and native Christians, much to the disadvantage of the Muslims and other non-Christian traders. The custom duty on cloth brought by the Muslims was

raised to ten per cent, while the Burghers and native Christians imported it at five per cent; and further reductions were considered. The Muslims were prevented from retail sale of cloth, but had to sell the textile wholesale to the Burghers. They were prevented from having private shops of their own. Rice imported by Muslims was liable to ten per cent duty, whereas Christians and Burghers imported it duty free. This was the only way, Van Goens argued, that the Christians and Burghers could prevail against the Muslims.³⁶

The above steps were taken to oust the Muslims from the island's export trade. Even the inland trade with the Kandyans in which the chief agents were the Muslims was checked. Cloth, salt, opium, and copper were bartered to the Kandyans for rice, sugar, cattle, goats, chicken and butter. The middleman made profits at both ends. Van Goens recommended that when peace was resorted, the king's subjects should be encouraged to bring their products directly as so to eliminate the middleman.³⁷ For the full implementation of this it was ordered that the Muslims should not be allowed to pass the kadavat (watch house on the boundary) to hawk their wares. Instead they should be allowed to cultivate their fields and gardens.³⁸

The emphasis on cultivation was an attempt to make the Company's territory self sufficient in grain which was always in short supply. Even the cotton growing and weaving textiles was experimented so that the import of South Indian cotton clothes by the Muslims would automatically cease. If the company lands were self sufficient in food and clothing, Van Goens envisaged that all those who wanted elephants, areca nut and timber must pay for them in cash. "If Ceylon could only progress sufficiently for us to depend entirely on our own cultivation to satisfy our needs, and the Moors were also prevented from bringing their cloth goods here, practical experience would prove it to be one of the most blessed countries in the world, and the Hon. Company and the fatherland could expect great profits there from."³⁹

The Dutch too like the Portuguese before them recognised that the Muslims had certain valuable skills which made them indispensable. "These Moors have the art of keeping up credit with the Company at large as well as with particulars among the Europeans, and a Moor is hardly ever known to be brought into a court of justice. The Company often makes use of their talents particularly when it wants to levy a tax upon any article of commerce. Nobody understands the value of pearls and precious stones as well as they, as in fact they are continually employed in the boring of pearls; and the persons who are used to farm the pearl fishery always rely on their skill in this article as well as in arithmetic to inform them what they are to give for the whole fishery. They perform all the calculations entirely by memory in which manner they are capable of reckoning up the most difficult fractions"⁴⁰ John Christopher Wolf, Secretary of State for the Dutch Government in Jaffnapatam, made these observations regarding the Muslims in 1782. These special skills of the Muslims persist even to this day.

The Company's policy towards the Muslims did not remain consistent throughout the period of its rule over the maritime provinces K.W.Goonewardena and D.A.Kotalawela have analysed how and why Dutch policy changed from time to time, with the personalities and prejudices of persons in power and due to pressure from the Heeren XVII and the predikants or Calvinist priests.⁴¹ As it is always happened it was one thing to pass laws and another thing to enforce them. The fact that many of the Company's officers were susceptible to bribes cannot be overlooked. The wealthy Muslims, with cash and gems at their disposal, could circumvent restrictions imposed on them. It was seen that in specific instances where the Muslim activities did not clash with the interest of the Company, they were tolerated and sometimes encouraged e.g. such as the poor agricultural Muslims settlers of the Galle Commandment and the wealthy merchants from Bengal. A cause of concern was that if too stringent measures were imposed on them, the Muslims would (and did) flee to Kandy and strengthened the enemy, and provoke the king to hostile action.

Above all, it was seen, that there were times when the Dutch could not do without the Muslims. Apart from the fact that the Muslims in Dutch territory had their own headmen, one of them being, Uduman Karder Meestrie Aydroos Lebbe Marikar. K.W. Goonewardena has given several examples of Muslims employed by the Company, as shroffs (due to their mathematical skill), translators (due to their linguistic fluency) and physicians (due to their knowledge of traditional medicine). Land grants were made by the Dutch officials to Muslims over looking the instructions that the Muslims could not own land.⁴²

It is relevant at this stage to examine the politics of the Kandyan Kingdom, the deterioration of the relations between the king and Company and the part played by the Muslims in the tangle. A dynastic change took place in Kandy in 1739, following a series of inter-marriages contracted with the Nayak, families of Madura and Tanjore. From the time of Rajasinha II (1635-1687), the kings of Kandy fetched brides from South India and these ladies were raised to the position of *aggamahesis* or chief queens, while the ladies from the Kandyan nobility remained as secondary wives. Rajasinha's son Vimala Dharma Suriya II (1687-1707) followed his father's example and took as his chief queen a "princess" from Madura. His son Sri Vira Parakrama Narendresinha (1707-1739) married the daughter of Pitti Nayakkar of the Vaduage caste who claimed kinship with the Nayaks of Madura. Narendrasinha died childless and with him the dynasty of Vimaladharma Suriya (1592-1604) of Kandy ended. The brother-in-law of the late king and the son of Pitti Nayakkar ascended the throne as Sri Vijaya Rajasingha (1739-1747), and began the Nayakkar dynasty. The last four kings, who ruled till the British took over Kandy in 1815, were Nayakkars. Sri Vijaya Rajasinha married several ladies from his own kind, and on his death the brother of the chief queen ascended the throne of Kandy as Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-1781). He was succeeded by his brother Rajadirajasinha (1781-1798). The last Nayakkar king, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798-1815), was an obscure youth whose parentage is still open to doubt.⁴³ With his reign, Sinhalese

kingship ended. The Nayakkar rulers although they were Hindus, embraced Buddhism and became its lavish patrons. Thus they endeared themselves to the hearts of the people who bore an intense devotion to their traditional faith.

Besides the dynastic change there were other features which influenced the internal politics of the kingdom. Every royal bride who came to Kandy was accompanied by her Kith and kin who made Kandy their permanent home, with the result that there were an ever increasing number of the king's Hindu Nayakkar relatives in the court, maintained at state expense.

Although the Kandyan nobles accepted the ruler who sat on the throne, they had no love whatsoever for his kinsmen who were even interfering in court politics. There were several other pressure groups operating in Kandy. An alien ruler was trying to maintain a precarious existence on the throne hedged in between two powerful factions. On one side there were his own ambitious relatives with the political and commercial links with South India, while opposed to them was the native landowning aristocracy, sons of the soil, with their traditional hold on the people. There was the *sangha* (community of Buddhist monks) who were influential at every level of society and kith and kin with the nobility. A few energetic Roman Catholic monks who had fled from Dutch territory were currying favour with the king and ministering to the needs of Catholics in Dutch territory. The Muslims who had penetrated into the interior to escape Dutch persecution were secretly maintaining trade links with South India, much to the consternation of the Dutch, and also serving the king in many ways. The Dutch on the coast waiting to fish in troubled waters had to face a new situation.⁴⁴

The Dutch who were cool calculating merchants had hitherto achieved their aims by following a policy of cajolery and flattery, soothing the king's vanity by high sounding titles, since they had strict orders to maintain peace with Kandy. From time to time the king demanded that his harbours should be open for his subjects to trade with foreign merchants but the pressure he could exert depended largely on his political and

military strength *visa a vis* the Company. In response to the king's demand the Company's policy was to oscillate between appeasement and force but never wholly committing itself one way or the other. It would occasionally grant a few concessions to placate the Court; such as allowing two or three ships per year, chartered by the king and sailing under his flag, to convey his merchandise to South India and return with special purchases needed by the king. The nobles took advantage of this and chartered vessels belonging to Muslims, in the king's name to proceed from Puttalam with merchandise. They could not, however, outwit the vigilant Hollander, for the vessels were seized and the "contraband" confiscated. It is clear from this episode that the Kandyan nobles and the Muslims worked hand in hand to break through the Dutch monopoly.⁴⁵

The Dutch felt, and rightly too, that it was the Muslim lobby in the Kandyan Court that was instigating the king to make persistent demands for trade concessions. The Dutch then tried to create a rift between the Kandyan nobles and the Muslims, warning the former that they were only antagonising a faithful ally and befriending a despicable "rabble". A threat of a forthcoming Muslim invasion of Sri Lanka was put forward to disturb the Kandyans. At the time when the victorious Moghul armies under Aurangzeb were penetrating deeper into South India, rumors were afloat that they would soon come up to Rameshvaran and engulf Sri Lanka. The Muslim traders would then betray this country to their co-religionists. Hence this was all the more reason why the king should enter into a firm friendship with the Company.⁴⁶ These arguments and threats did not convince the king; he did not change his policy and the Sinhala-Muslim alliance remained firm despite all Dutch attempts to disrupt it. With the accession of the Nayakkars there developed a triple partnership to counter act Dutch policies.

The Nayakkars had brought with them the wider experience of South India; they had tasted "the sweets of commerce"⁴⁷ and were no longer duped by caresses and compliments, but wished earnestly to participate in the export trade. The Dutch intensely disliked the Nayakkars for the same reason that they disliked the Muslims; for the Nayakkars were

by caste and occupation traders and hence their interest clashed with those of the Dutch. In spite of all Dutch attempts to check the change, Kandy was no longer an isolated unit, but was now drawn into the wider arena of South Indian politics for the Nayakkars had their Kinsmen in the mainland. The relatives of the king had frequent intercourse with the Thevar of Ramnad, once a feudatory of the Nayak of Madura, whose territories lay closest to the island separated by a few miles of shallow sea. The Thevar was a rival of the Dutch in commercial matters. The Dutch had imposed on this state a treaty forbidding access to all traders except themselves and had stationed an officer at Kilkare to enforce it.⁴⁸

The interests of Thevar, the king of Kandy and his Nayakkar relatives, the Muslims traders of South India and Sri Lanka and the Kandyan nobles were all interwoven and they united against Dutch aggression. In order to penetrate into the Indo-Sri Lanka trading system, the Dutch had to control not only the coasts of Sri Lanka but also those of South India. They then tried to lay hands on all the key commodities of trade by being the sole purchasers of cloth from Madura, areca from Sri Lanka and all the pearls and chanks fished in the surrounding seas. All these attempts were inimical to the aims of the local rulers and the Muslims commercial magnates who had been well established in the business. The Dutch had superior naval power to back them and the only guiding principle which they ruthlessly applied had been forcefully expressed by Jan Pieterz Coen who assured the Heeren XVII in 1664, "Your Honour should know by experience that trade in Asia must be driven and maintained under the protection and favour of your Honours' own weapons and that the weapons must be paid for by the profits from the trade, so that we cannot carry on trade without war nor war without trade."⁴⁹ Although their territorial possession in Sri Lanka were not very extensive the Dutch maintained their hold on the forts of Trincomalee and Batticaloa and the redoubts at Kottiyar on the east coast and guarded Kalpitiya on the west coast. By means of sloops which vigilantly cruised the waters in the vicinity of the ports, they seized all trading vessels, confiscated the goods and intercepted

any communications the king had with powers across the sea, thus economically strangling the kingdom, diluting its sovereignty and eroding the king's dignity and self respect.

Periyathamby Marikkar was one of the merchant princes of the seventeenth century, a subject of the Thevar of Ramnad who was very much involved in the Indo – Sri Lanka trade. One of his many commercial ventures was shipping large quantities of coarse cloth across the Gulf of Mannar to the west coast of Sri Lanka and carrying away Sri Lankan areca nuts to Malabar and the Coromandel. When faced with opposition from the superior naval strength of the Dutch he restored to smuggling into the creeks and backwaters of the indented coastline between Mannar and Puttalam. In these nooks and crannies washed by the shallow waters he would barter his wares with the Kandyans and local Muslims, although the Company's armed vessels kept patrolling the high seas.⁵⁰

How much the Dutch disliked Nayakkar and Muslim influence in the Kandyan court is clear from the complaints of successive governors. Julius Stein Van Gollense (1743-51) writes that the Kandyan demands for freedom to trade began “ever since the scandalous rabble of Moors flocked to their land is such great numbers.”⁵¹ Joan Gideon Loten (1752-57) wished to see a Kandyan prince on the throne so that the pernicious coast Nayakkars, Malabars and Moorish scum who practice in every way imaginable, all manner of illicit trade entirely to the prejudice of the Company,⁵² would be removed from the court.

Jan Schreuder writing in 1762 took the same attitude, “how harmful their intrusions and frequent comings and goings to and from Kandy, of Nayakkars, Moors and Chetties and other such folk have always been and still are to the Company; for in addition to eating up as it were our inhabitants and raising the price of our commodities they corrupt the Kandyans by their conversation, and the Moors in particular will not given up smuggling although it is done at the risk of life and goods.”⁵³

With the Nayakkar accession, the Kandyan court became more insistent in its demands for free commercial connections with traders from other countries who for centuries had visited the island's ports. The Muslims who continued to escape to Kandy fearing Dutch harassments fanned the flames of discontent. All sections of Kandyan society stood to lose by the Company's monopolistic policy; the king, his Nayakkar relatives, the nobles, the peasants and the traders like the Muslims and the Chetties were unanimous in their demand for open harbours. When merchandise came into the kingdom as it had in the years before the Hollander had imposed his restrictions, and increase in revenue from custom duty followed. If trade could be reestablished there would be an increase in revenue and with more competition for the country's products general prosperity would follow. But when all this was channeled through the Dutch ports, the king lost not only a source of revenue but also his income derived from trading the produce of the royal villages.

The Kandyan nobles, though they did not engage in trade themselves employed Muslim merchants to trade on their behalf. So the Dutch monopolistic policy and the consequent crippling of trading activity resulted in the loss of a source of money income and foreign luxuries for the nobles. Governor Gustaaf Willem Baron Van Imhoff (1736-1740) himself admits that the sale of areca nuts to the Dutch was not of much profit to the villager; for the Company paid him the paltry sum of five or six larins for a load of areca if it was brought to the Dutch warehouse at Colombo or Kalpitiya; and this journey took the Kandyan villager at least four days to go and four days to return. If the Company was the sole importer of cloth to the island, the Kandyans inevitably had to pay a higher price if they wished to indulge in the luxury of wearing South Indian textiles. Thus the elimination of the Muslim trader and the imposition by the Company of a drastic monopoly adversely affected every body and contributed to the economic decline of the kingdom.⁵⁴

As could be expected relations between the king and the Company steadily declined from a state of cold war to an open conflict. By the end of 1760 the Company's subjects groaning under the harsh administration of Governor Schreuder burst into open revolt and in 1761 the armies of the King poured across the border and joined the rebels. This conflict ended with the devastating invasion of Kandy in 1765 and the disastrous treaty of 1766.⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that despite the Dutch detestation of the Muslims and their condemnation of them in harsh terms they still used their services. The Muslims likewise did not forego opportunities for gainful employment under the Dutch involving such work as espionage.

In the course of the Kandyan-Dutch war the Muslims served both parties as hired employees. There was a Company of free Moors who fought on the side of the Dutch. In addition they were frequently employed as spies and couriers due to their itinerant habits and the facility with which they crossed the border passing off as traders.⁵⁶ In 1762, Mr. Jan Bauert, the Senior Merchant and Disave of Colombo ordered two Muslims, Mera Pulle Marikkar Lebbe of Colombo and Vayasa Sinnathamby of the King's territory to find out secretly what the Kandyans and the Company's subjects were doing and what they intended to do, their topics of conversation and above all what was happening in the king's court.

They are said to have dressed as "Kandyan Moors" (obviously there was a difference in appearance between the low country and up-country Muslims) and proceeded to the king's land to gather information.⁵⁷ Another spy Wagu Pulle Segu Mohammedu reported on the flight of the king to Hanguranketa when the Dutch armies were converging on Kandy in 1765.⁵⁸ Major Arnoldus Frankena who remained behind with the Dutch garrison in Kandy, with great difficulty persuaded a Muslim to take a letter to Colombo for 300 pagodas.⁵⁹ If such couriers were subject to suspicion they were examined and if letters were found they were normally executed but there had been occasions when Sinhalese

intervened to save them.⁶⁰ On one occasion a Muslim was examined and the letter was not found since it was small and wrapped with a little lead and was “hidden in a place which decency forbids us to describe”⁶¹ During the troublous period the king of Kandy sent Muslim messengers with secret offers of cash to the Moor chief of Dutch territory, to join the Kandyans. These messengers were interrogated and executed by the Dutch.⁶²

In times of war, Muslims were in great demand by the Dutch to transport provisions for the invading armies along the rocky defiles. The Muslims owned herds of pack oxen, since these beasts of burden were the only form of transport available to carry merchandise. The Sinhalese owned cattle but they were used for agricultural purposes only. The Muslims who were employed to carry provisions were known as coolies. (Cooly one who performs a menial service and the word is derived from Uliyam which is a tax on foreigners).⁶³ The Dutch found the Sinhalese unreliable for this purpose because they often joined the enemy. It is clear from the sources that the Muslims hated this service and it was extracted by force. When war broke out Abraham Samlant, the Commander of Galle was informed that the Muslim headmen at Matara and Weligama should supply 40 and 80 coolies respectively and even if one is lacking the headmen should be deposed and punished. They should also supply 500 pack animals that should be personally examined by the Commander. Jan Willem Schorer under Merchant at Mannar was requested to send to Negombo 500 trained pack oxen with 250 drivers, who were to be hired even by force.⁶⁴

Due to the nature of the country and sickness among the coolies, transport difficulties were uppermost in the minds of the Governor Baron Van Eck when he instructed Schorer at Mannar to send 300 smart and strong Moors or the so called Masulipatam coolies (who had originally come from the Coromandel coast) paying them each two Rix dollars monthly plus one rupee in lieu of one parra of rice. “In pressing them into service, prevent the native officials from extorting money from the rich for exemption.”⁶⁵

It could be said that as the 18th century wore on, the Dutch hostility towards Islam gradually wore out. Governor Iman Willem Falck (1765-83) found that most of the lower classes of Muslims were ignorant of their own laws and as a result they were subject to great oppression by the headmen who decided cases. All the headmen had copies of their laws written in Arabic or Tamil, but in order to enhance the value of their own opinions they refused to divulge these laws to any others and were against the government publishing them. Governor Flack is reported to have obtained from Batavia in 1770, a short code relating to the laws of inheritance and marriage, which he submitted for consideration to all Muslim headmen.⁶⁶ However, Alexander Johnstone, Chief Justice under the British government, had succeeded in getting more information from learned Muslims of his time. They had provided him with notes which were in their possession, regarding decisions given to similar cases by judges in Baghdad and Cordova which had been observed as law amongst the Muslims of Sri Lanka for seven to eight hundred years.⁶⁷ Johnstone got some copies printed and pasted in the principal mosques in Colombo.⁶⁸ It is clear that Muslims both in Kandyan and Dutch territory followed Islamic laws when it came to marriage, divorce and inheritance.⁶⁹ It is said of the Muslims in Jaffna, that they almost always had more than one wife.⁷⁰ This may have been the case with most Muslims in Sri Lanka since polygamy subject to certain conditions was permissible in Islam.

The period under survey, when the Portuguese and then the Dutch ruled the maritime provinces could be regarded as a watershed for the Muslims in Sri Lanka. Prior to the sixteenth century their settlements were attached to the port towns and they lived as foreigners in the bazaars and streets with little contact with the rest of society. Many of them spent only a part of their time in Sri Lanka and the rest overseas, mainly in South India. Like the Indian plantation workers of the 19th century who lived in their own estate communities with little contact with the peasants of the neighbouring villages but maintaining close links with South India, the Muslims till the 16th century were not integrated into Sri Lanka society. The bigotry of the

Christian powers made it imperative for the Muslims to penetrate into Kandyan territory to maintain their identity and it was here that the indigenisation of the Muslims took place.

The Kandyan kings welcomed the industrious visitors for many reasons. The Sinhala peasant was addicted to his ancestral land and due to caste prejudices did not consider trading as a very respectable vocation. Nevertheless trade was vital to the country's economy and the Muslim trader who had access to the ports and with links abroad was very helpful in bartering the products of the kingdom for South Indian textiles, salt and dried fish from the coast. Even when the Hollander imposed a strict monopoly, channeling all key Kandyan exports through the Company and guarding the island's ports to prevent what they called was illicit trade, the Muslim merchants with their intimate knowledge of the seas around managed to maintain the commerce. It will be seen how Muslim villages arose along the trade routes to Kandy, and also in the interior where the kings had given them grants of land as an encouragement to settle down. The presence of Muslims in the Eastern province was a source of strength to the king not only because of their rice production but also because the king needed their help with regard to foreign visitors who arrived in Trincomalee. The kings of Kandy were very knowledgeable on world affairs and it was through the Muslims that they kept abreast of the power politics operating abroad.

The process by which groups on itinerant coast dwelling traders, aliens in race, language, religion and culture became an integral part of Sri Lankan society, without losing or even diluting their cultural characteristics in anyway, will form the theme of the next chapter. The Sri Lankanisation of the Muslims is a multi-faceted and fascinating process which took place in the Kandyan kingdom and is perhaps unique as regards minority – majority relations.

NOTES

1. C.R.Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire 1415-1485*, London, 1969. P. 39 ff.
2. T.B.H.Abeyasinghe, "Muslims in Sri Lanka in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries" in M.A.M. Shukri (ed.) *Muslims in Sri Lanka, Avenues to Antiquity*, Colombo, 1986, pp. 129-145.
3. Queyroz, p. 742.
4. Alexander Johnstone to the Governor, Nov. 1807, SLNA 5/79/51-112.
5. Emerson Tennent, Vol. I, p. 534-535.
6. Queyroz, p. 193.
7. Paul E. Pieris, Ceylon: *The Portuguese Era*, Vol.I, Colombo, 1913, pp.70 – 73.
8. Queyroz, p. 754.
9. Queyroz, p. 746.
10. Queyroz, p. 743. A *vidane* was the head of a department or of a subdivision. A *Kanakapulle* was an officer connected with the keeping of accounts or records.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Queyroz, p. 742. A *casado* is a married Portuguese settler.

14. H.F. Hourani, *Arab seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval times*, New Jersey, 1951, p.p 106 – 107.
15. Tennent, Vol. I, p. 537, footnote.
16. Queyroz, p. 745.
17. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire* p. 72.
18. Queyroz, p. 745.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. C.R. de Silva, *The Portuguese in Ceylon, 1617-1638*, Colombo, 1972, pp. 84 – 86.
22. Queyroz, p. 865.
23. *Ibid.*
24. A.C.Lawrie, A. *Gazetteer of the Central Provinces of Ceylon*, 2 Volumes, Colombo, 1896 and 1898, Vol.I, p. 6, Akurana is a village 8 miles north of Kandy on the Matale road.
25. Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics, The Search for Legitimacy*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1977, p. 34.
26. T.B.H. Abeyasinghe, *Portuguese Rule in Ceylon, 1594 – 1612*, Colombo, 1966, p. 172.
27. Boxer, *The Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, p. 79.
28. *op. cit.* pp. 67-68.

29. *Ibid.*
30. C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800*, London, 1965.
31. For details, C.R.Boxer, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124.
32. C.R.Boxer, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
33. *Memories of Ryckloff Van Goens, 1663-1675*, translated by E. Reimers, Colombo, 1932, p. 35.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Van Goens, p. 39.
36. Van Goens, p. 18.
37. Van Goens, p. 17.
38. Van Goens, p. 12 - 13.
39. Van Goens, p. 17.
40. The Life and Adventures of *John Christopher Wolf, late Principal Secretary of State at Jaffnapatam in Ceylon in 1782*, London, MDCCLXXXV, pp. 261-262.
41. M.A.M Shukri (ed.) *Muslims of Sri Lanka: Avenues to Antiquity*, Sri Lanka, 1986, Chap. V. "Muslims under Dutch Rule in Sri Lanka, 1638-1796", by D.A. Kotelawe and Chap. VI, "Muslims under Dutch Rule up to the mid Eighteenth Century" by Karl W. Goonewardene.
42. *op. cit.*, p. 198-199.

43. For details see L.S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom of Sri Lanka* (1707-1782), Second Edition 1988 Chap II.
44. *op. cit.*, p. 97-98.
45. S.Arasaratnam, "The Kingdom of Kandy: Aspects of its external relations and commerce, 1658-1710", in *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social studies*, Vol.III, July – Dec., 1960, No. 2 p. 121.
46. Arasaratnam *op. cit.*, p. 120.
47. *Memoriy of Jan Schreuder*, Colombo, 1946, p. 18.
48. *Op. cit.*, pp. 42-43.
49. Quoted by C.R.Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne empire*, p. 96.
50. S.Arasaratnam, "A Note on Periyathamby Marikkar, A Seventeenth Century commercial Magnate" in *Tamil Culture*, Vol. II, No. 1, Jan – March, 1964, pp. 51-57.
51. *Memoir of Julius Stein Van Gollennesse, Governor of Ceylon* (1743-51), translated and edited with an introduction and notes by Sinnappah Arasaratnam, Sri Lanka, 1974, p. 45.
52. *Memoir of John Gideon Loten, Governor of Ceylon*, (1752-57), translated E. Reimers, 1935, p.3.
53. *Memoir of Jan Schreuder*, p. 24.
54. *Memoir of Gustaaf Willem Baron Van Imhoff*, 1736-40, translated by Sophia Pietersz, Colombo, 1911, p. 11.
55. For details of the war and the treaty which followed see; *Secret Minutes of the Dutch Political Council*,

- 1762, Edited and translated by J.H.O. Paulusz, Ceylon, 1954; *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Ceylon Branch*, Vol. XVI, 1899, "Governor Van Eck's Expedition against the King of Kandy, 1765," translated from the Dutch by A.E. Buultjens pp. 36-51. *Ceylon Historical Journal*" Vol II Nos. 1 & 2 July and August 1952 pp. 28 – 42. The Treaty of 1766 between the King of Kandy and the Dutch. "*CHJ*, Vol.II, Nos. 3 and 4, Jan and April, 1953, pp. 265-275 and *CHJ* Vol III No.2 October 1953, pp 145 – 155.
56. J.Van Goor, *Jan Kompanie as Schoolmaster, Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690-1795*, p. 13.
57. *Secret Minutes of the Dutch Political Council, 1762*. Edited and translated by J.H.O. Paulusz, p. 115.
58. *The Dutch Wars with Kandy 1764 – 66* Major R.Raven Hart, Ceylon, 1984, p. 112.
59. *op. cit*, p. 120.
60. *op. cit*, p. 118.
61. *Ibid*.
62. *Ibid*.
63. "The Moors and Chetties were liable to a special *Uliyam* which according to some authorities was imposed by the Sinhalese Kings on their first arrival in consideration of their being granted the exclusive right to trade in certain imported articles in Colombo and other sea ports. According to others it was an impost on the privilege of being allowed to reside in the island. The *Uliyam* consisted of working at the roads and fortifications for three months in the year. The levy was no doubt originally imposed by the Sinhalese kings and subsequently rendered forbiddingly stringent by the

Portuguese”, Paul E. Pieris, *Ceylon, the Portuguese Era*, Vol II, Sri Lanka, 1983, pp. 84-85.

64. Raven Hart, p. 85.
65. Raven Hart, p. 25.
66. T.Nadaraja, *The Legal System of Ceylon in its historical setting*, Brillles, 1972, p. 14, also SLNA 5/79, pp. 51-112.
67. *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, Part I London, 1824, p. 547, note 8.
68. SLNA 5/79, pp. 51-53.
69. SLNA 5/79, pp. 116.
70. *The Life and Adventures of John Christopher Wolf, late Principal Secretary of State of Jaffnapatam in Ceylon, for the Dutch government*, London, MDCCLXXXV, pp. 261-263.

IV. MUSLIMS IN THE KANDYAN KINGDOM: STRUCTURAL ASSIMILATION c.1600-1815

“Islam and Hinduism existed side by side with Buddhism and Tamils and Hindus enjoyed equal rights with the Sinhalese as the King’s subjects. Some Muslims and Tamils served in the King’s administration in high positions and were used on important missions to the Dutch and to Indian kings. Rajasinha (1635-87) seems to have been in a fit position to unite all races and religions of the country under his leadership with the result that he was served equally by all peoples without distinction. In this he was following the Hindu and Buddhist ideal of monarchy.

S.Arasaratnam,

It was seen in the preceding chapter that with the repressive measures of the Christian powers in the maritime provinces, and the consequent influx of Muslims into the interior of the island, the indigenisation of the Muslims commenced. At first they took refuge in Sitavaka territory and later in the Kandyan kingdom. There is evidence that considerable numbers of Muslims were settled in the eastern coast Senarat (1604-1635) and his son Rajasinha II (1635-1687) encouraged refugees to settle down. Two land grants were made by the royal father and son in 1631 and 1645 to the Muslim physician Suluttan Kuttiya, who was originally practising medicine in Galle¹. He was invited to the Kandyan court, taken into royal service and given land near Gampola, where his descendants lived till 1874 and were known as Galle Vedaralala or the physicians from Galle. Although one cannot be sure of the numbers, it is reasonable to assume that there was a drift of Muslims to the interior in the eighteenth century as well. They made the Kandyan kingdom their base and travelled up and down for purpose of trade when conditions were not unfavourable. The first generation of immigrants married Kandyan women and their offspring who were invariably socialised as Muslims, either intermarried among themselves or married new immigrants of the same faith so that with each

generation the Islamic identity was maintained and strengthened. Despite all Dutch attempts to prevent it, the Muslims as we have seen continued their trade contacts with South India and were therefore in touch with flourishing centres of Islamic culture. Visits of Muslim saints specially Sufis provided doctrinal reinforcement and intellectual stimulation while the presence of shrines and mosques and the pilgrimages to Adam's Peak gave spiritual nourishment to the isolated Islamic communities in the Udarata. Above all the tolerance of the Kandyan kings and people towards other religions and the flexibility of Kandyan institutions enabled the new-comers to develop as a cohesive group and simultaneously get incorporated as a group into the Kandyan body politic. Perhaps in no other Muslim minority country in the world has such an assimilative process taken place.

The process which took place in the Kandyan kingdom was one of structural assimilation, which is a term used by sociologists to denote the integration of ethnic groups into full social participation primarily through gaining access to informal or primary groups such as families, clubs, and cliques. This process differs from cultural assimilation in the course of which the ethnic minority acquires the values, beliefs, language and behaviour of the numerically dominant group. The Muslims of the Kandyan kingdom were not thus acculturated, but maintained intact their identity through their adherence to Islam and the distinctive features associated with the religion; but became equal and indispensable participants in the mainstream of Kandyan society. From a trading community with tenuous affiliations to the host culture, they developed paradoxically into a group which while remaining devoutly Islamic, had a place in the most intimate and innermost recesses of Kandyan life; in the administration of the Dalada Maligava which enshrined the palladium of Buddhist royalty; in the pomp and ceremony of the *viharas* and *devales* and in the day to day functioning of the monasteries which were the hub of the spiritual and cultural life of the village. Herein lies the uniqueness. The Muslims of the Kandyan kingdom, like the Muslims of today were not an assimilationist minded minority

desiring absorption with the majority group. They achieved the fullest participation in the socio-economic life of the Kandyan kingdom without losing themselves in the larger whole. This was made possible by their voluntary association in the socio-economic mechanism known as the *badda* system.

The Socio-political Structure

The Kandyan administrative structure and the working of the *badda* system will be discussed in brief since it is crucial to the analysis which follows.² The whole political system of Kandy was based upon, and the social system revolved around a monarchy which in theory was absolute.

The king was lord of the soil and as such he had absolute control over the disposal of land, which formed the basis of his power. His proprietary rights were exercised in many ways. As lord of the soil he could command certain labour services from the tenants in his lands and also demand from them a share of the crop. All the paddy lands in the kingdom were subject to compulsory services or *rajakariya*³ in the form of military services in case of national emergency and labour services in the construction of roads and other works of public utility. Certain paddy lands which were occupied by members of the lower castes were subject to services of a specialised nature depending on the caste of the occupant. In addition to these labour services all the paddy land in the kingdom was subject to a grain tax. The king had the right to exempt any land from any kind of taxation or to divert the labour funds at his disposal or the revenue he received to any person or institution. Since the economy of the Kandyan kingdom was largely non-monetary, the king obtained the services and ensured the loyalty of the higher officers by generous grants of his rights over land. This meant that all the benefit that the king derived from a *gama* or village whether in the form of cash, produce or services were henceforth diverted to the donee. The grants were made either in perpetuity which meant that the heirs of the donee could inherit the land, or the gift was enjoyed only as long as the donee held a particular office after which it passed to his successor in office⁴.

Further the king made grants of land to monasteries and other religious and educational institutions. If the gift was made to a Buddhist monastery or a *vihara*, the same principle operated and the cash, produce and service due to the king from that land were channeled towards the maintenance of the *bhikkhus* living in that *vihara* and the performance of its rites and ceremonies. The unit of allocation was a village and such a village was known as a *viharagama*. In the same manner the king allocated villages for the maintenance of Hindu shrines or *devals* which were also part of the state religious system and such lands were known as *devalagama*. Thus the king paid his officials, obtained the labour needed for peacetime development and the military services during national emergencies; rewarded his subjects for exceptional merit and loyalty maintained the pomp. Ceremonial and smooth functioning of the palace and gained the faithful allegiance of the ecclesiastics through his ownership of land. In fact the whole administrative machinery hinged round the system of service tenure.

“The country being wholly his, the King farms out his land, not for money but service. And the people enjoy portions of land from the King and instead of rent, they have their several appointments, some are to serve him for labourers and others are farmers to furnish his house with the fruits of the ground; and so all things are done without cost and every man paid for his pains; that is they have lands for it.”⁵

The king had two chief ministers called *adigars* who had extensive powers and were paid by grants of land, they were the king's advisors, were members of the council of ministers; they acted as chief justices and military chiefs and were the channel of communication between the king and the general public.

The Kandyan administrative system was a territorial one and its main feature was the delegation of the king's powers over his kingdom to a number of officers; at the apex were the great provincial chiefs, the *disaves* and *rateralas*, and the base of the pyramid was formed by a number of headmen,

each of whom had a distinct area of territory over which he exercised the functions of government. The kingdom consisted of two major territorial divisions, the *ratas* and *disavas*. The *ratas* formed the nucleus of the kingdom and were all situated in the mountain plateau within close proximity of Kandy. At the time of British occupation there were nine *ratas* namely:- Uduvura, Yatinuvura, (in which the town of Kandy is situated) Tumpane, Harispattuva, Dumbara, Hevahata, Kotmale, Uda Bulatgama and Pata Bulatgama. The head of each *rata* was a *raterala*, who was assisted in his duties by lesser officers known as *korala*, *atukorala* and *vidane* or headman of the village which was the smallest administrative unit.

While the *ratas* were smaller units radiating from Kandy, the *disavas* were more extensive areas sloping away from the central plateau towards the Dutch border or sea. At the time of British occupation there were twelve *disavas* namely:- Four Korales, Seven Korales, Uva, Matale, Sabaragamuva, Three Korales, Valapane, Udalapate, Nuvarakalaviya, Vellassa, Bintanna and Tamankaduva. Of these the first four were styled *maha* or greater *disavas* and the rest *sulu* or lesser *disavas*. Kirthi Sri Rajasingha (1747-1780) added six more to the list of *sulu disavas*. They were Panama, Munnessarama, Thambalagamuvu, Madakalapuva (Batticaloa), Kottiyarama and Puttalama⁶. All these were areas which bordered the sea and the last three were ports. Obviously the king had reckoned the growing importance of trade and the need for more administrative control of the coastline when readjusting his provincial boundaries.

The *disave* or *disapathi* which meant Provincial Governor had supreme command over the province to which he was appointed. He had his own administrative staff to which he appointed members of the local aristocracy of his province. At the head of this hierarchy of official was the *disave mohottala* who had his subordinate in sub divisions into which the province was divided such as *korales* and *pattus*. In the lower rungs of the bureaucracy the number of officers increased but the territorial sphere of their authority became less⁷.

The administrative organisation so far discussed was a territorial one with a hierarchy of officials converging at the apex of each province and owing all allegiance to the *disave* Governor who normally resided in Kandy. Co-existing with this was a system of departments known as *baddas* which cut vertically across the horizontal system. The word *baddas* may be defined in many ways but in this context it denotes “a caste group organised as a unit for purposes of revenue and service to the state”⁸, a mechanism by which the labour resources of the kingdom could be mobilised for public service.⁹

The dominant feature in Kandyan society during the period under survey was the stratification of the people into categories of various ranks. These were called castes: a caste being defined “as an endogamous and hereditary sub-division of an ethnic unit occupying a position of superior or inferior rank of social esteem in comparison with other such sub-divisions.”¹⁰ Since admission to a caste was determined by birth alone there was no social mobility within the system of stratification. Caste, in Sinhala society, had no religious sanction as it had in India: nevertheless, it entered into the administration, both secular and ecclesiastical regulated taxation and governed all social relationships. The state departments known as *baddas* were an institutionalisation of the caste system which had no other legitimisation in a Buddhist society, for the Buddha vehemently denounced social divisions based on caste, with the Brahmins as the dominant elite.¹¹

In Sri Lanka there was and still is a bifurcation of society, dominated by what A.M.Hocart has aptly termed the “farmer aristocracy” or the *govikula* (govi-agricultural and kula-clan). During the period under survey, when we have conclusive evidence from European writers the *govikula* or *govigama* was certainly, politically important, economically privileged and socially superior. The *govikula* which consisted of more than half the Sinhala population was considered *kulina*. “Classy” as opposed to all the other groups which were *hina jati* or people of low birth. Within the *govikula* there were a series of divisions some of which had crystalised into sub-

castes. The *radala* and *mudali*, the highest of these sub-castes were strictly endogamous and these two formed the nobility of the Kandyan Kingdom from which the highest officers were recruited. The rest of the *govi* population was considered honourable and the majority of it consisted of *rate atto*, corresponding to a landed yeomanry from which were filled the numerous minor offices at the lower rungs of the administrative structure. The term *govi* could be misleading for while they all held lands and derived their income from it, many of them never tilled the soil, but employed the services of others.

A seeming anomaly is that the entire population was agricultural. In fact everyone held land and lived on the soil: but every caste other than the *govikula* specialised in some hereditary craft as well, and it alone had the privilege to supply a particular kind of labour to the state and society. Thus the so called “low castes” *rada* (washermen), *berava* (drummers) and *ambattayo* (barbers) served the state, the *goigama* aristocracy and the monastic establishments in a ritual or functional capacity and were essential to social life. There caste groups with their traditional skills were geared to the state administration through the elaborate mechanism known as the *badda* organisation.

The authority of each *badda* over the caste group and its services was all embracing and penetrated into the provinces stopping short only at boundaries of the kingdom. The *badda* system was highly centralised and functioned under separate department heads. For instance, the *kottalbadda* or artificers department had within it all the craftsmen of the kingdom. They were silversmiths, blacksmiths, brassfounders, carpenters, lapidaries, sculptors who were called by the general caste name of *acari*. In every *rata* and *disava* the *acari* caste was under two officers known as *udarata kottalbadda nilame* (head of the artificers in the highlands) and *patarata kottalbadda nilame* (head of the artificers in the lowlands).¹²

These chiefs appointed headmen of the *acari* caste who organised the services of the various craftsmen under them. These craftsmen worked for the king or *disave* without

discrimination as for example. Manufacturing all bows and arrow, spears and shafts needed in time of war as well as the metal ware for the *disave's* house, If the king granted a village to a *vihara* the people of the *acari* caste in that village would then render *rajakariya* to the vihara. All the craftsmen held land in return for services, so that they like everybody else were cultivators but rendered the traditional service demanded of their caste.

The potters who belonged to the *badahala badda* came annually to perform their *rajakariya* to Kandy, in rotation from four provinces. Each provincial chief of the potter's department sent his quota of men to the capital for the purpose. They rendered whatever service was required of them for two months of the year, receiving only rations for their labour. The king thus, always had some potters at his disposal to supply the needs of the palace. In his manner the traditional skills of every caste were channeled for state service through the *badda* organisation. The other baddas which functioned in this manner were *radabadda* (laundry department), *kuruvebadda* (elephants' department) and *handabadda* (weaver's department).¹³

The Structural Assimilation of the Muslims into the Kandyan body politic

Remarkable as it may seem, the Muslims of the Kandyan kingdom were incorporated into this variegated structure and they together with the fisher folk (*karave* caste) formed the *madige badda* translated as the transport department or carriage bullock department¹⁴. When and how the Muslims and fisher folk were associated with the *madige* badda can only be conjectured.

Michael Roberts in his work entitled *Caste Conflict and Elite formation*, concludes that the *karave*, *durave* and *salagama* casts were comprised largely of relatively recent Indian migrants¹⁵. It was seen that a well-established tradition attributes the origin of the *salagama* castes to a group of weavers who came from South India in the thirteenth century¹⁶.

Roberts, after examining the evidence at his disposal states that the *karave* folk appeared to have trickled in over a period of time extending from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century and all three castes were concentrated on the strip bordering the sea in the south and west of the island till the eighteenth century. As we have seen the *salagama* (or *Chalias* of the European sources) who were weavers, were assigned the task of peeling cinnamon by the Sitavaka kings. The *Durave* or *chandos* were toddy tappers who continued their profession and the *karave* were fisher folk who latter took to trade. During this period they had adopted the indigenous language and religion and became Sinhalese castes confined to the maritime areas in the south and west. Robert Knox, writing in the latter half of the seventeenth century does not mention any of the three groups, *karave*, *durave* or *salagama* in his account of Kandyan castes. However, it is known that in the eighteenth century there were some *karave* and *salagama* folk residing in the Kandyan kingdom.

The *salagamas* fled to Kandyan territory mainly to escape the heavy *burden* of supplying cinnamon to the Company. The *karaves*, who were also a non agricultural people went to the interior for purposes of trade carrying salt and dried fish from the coast to the kingdom. Possibly at this juncture when they had gained in prestige as purveyors of salt and dried fish to the king's stores, they were assigned lands by the King and grafted to the *madige badda*¹⁷. It is also possible that the Muslims who were trading in the kingdom from the seventeenth century, at least were already associated with the *madige* at the time the fisher folk were affiliated to it. The Sinhala king in his capacity as head of the economic and social order had the power to assign economic functions and grant lands if he thought fit to any group of people extraneous or indigenous and incorporate them into the *badda* system. In this process the fisher folk were absorbed into Sinhala society, but the Muslims were not thus acculturated because they clung tenaciously to their faith; but they functioned technically like a caste group.

It was seen that the personnel of each *badda* had to serve the state with their special skills or with the particular products at their disposal. Hence the Muslims and fisher-folk were both included in the *madige badda* because both groups of people had frequent contacts with the coasts, had access to supplies of salt and dried fish (which were rare luxuries in the kingdom) and owned pack oxen which was the only form of transport within the kingdom and also with the coast.

Sir John D'Oyly, who was President of the Kandyan Provinces, immediately after the British took over from 1815 – 1824 records that the following villages which belonged to the *madige* were occupied by fisher folk, namely, Talgomuva, Valagama, Ahaliyagoda, Ragala, Talavatte and Udanvita¹⁸. The fisher-folk were organised for service under their own *muhandirams* and *lekams*. Each person who owned one *amunam*¹⁹ of paddy land was bound to supply one bullock for transporting government stores. The lands occupied by headmen (*gammahe*) were exempted but they had to provide other service. Each bullock transported to the royal store of *maha gabadava* one bag containing forty measures of salt and one dried fish and for the *madige* disava, two dried fish²⁰. In addition to this service the fisher folk as well as the Muslims were commissioned to trade in areca nut (which was a royal monopoly) on behalf of the treasury. The functioning of this agency will be described later.

The Muslims living in the villages who were organised under their own *mohandirams* and *lekams* belonged to the *hulan badda madige*. The Sinhala word *hulan* means 'wind' and therefore early British writers have concluded that because the Muslims held no lands, they were considered a floating population and classified as *hulan badda madige*²¹. This etymology seems fanciful and far fetched. Besides there is evidence that in the course of time the Muslims did own and cultivate paddy lands in addition to cultivating as share croppers. Since their oxen grazed in the king's lands the Muslims had to provide beasts of burden to transport any article for the king or the chief of the *madige*. For instance, the Muslims of Dumbuluvava consisting of eight to ten people

organised under a *mohandiram*, and the Muslims of Hingula consisting of six to eight people under one *mohandiram* were employed in the conveyance of grain two or three times a year, at every harvest if necessary either for the king or the chief of the *madige*²². The Muslims of Uva which lay in the proximity of the salt pans of the south east had to bring salt to the royal stores as a part of their obligatory service²³.

The entire department was under the *madige badda nilame* appointed by the king and some times it was placed under a provincial governor. In the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinha, Sheikh Alim, a Muslim was appointed *madige badda nilame* and after him his grandson, Sheikh Abdul Cader held the same office²⁴. Later, Makula Mohandiram, a Muslim was *madige disave* of the Seven Korales²⁵. Since the *madige* department included both Sinhalese and Muslims, here we find an example of Muslims rising to high offices of authority over the Sinhalese through their association with the *badda* system. Obviously, race and religion were of no consequence when it came to appointments of offices whether high or low. Knox relates the romantic story of a Dutchman who for the love of a Kandyan woman, entered the king's service and rose to be the *Udarata Kottalbadda nilame* or chief of the Artificers' Department²⁶.

The *madige* chief functioned through a vidane whom he appointed. At village level the Muslims were organised for service by *mohandirams* and *lekamas* who were also appointed by the chief.

All these appointees had to purchase their offices by the payment of a fee to the *madige* chief. This was how the latter paid his annual appointment fee to the treasury²⁷. It is fairly certain that most of the offices of the *hulan badda madige* were held by Muslims. There are several Muslims families in the *Udarata* today bearing the family names *mohandiramlage*, *vidanelage* and *lekamage* all of which signify their official connections in the past. Ralph Pieris has shown how it is possible to identify an individual ancestry and family history from the family names prefixed to the personal names²⁸.

It is interesting to note how the special skills of the Muslims, mainly in the sphere of trade in which they excelled were channeled towards the benefits of the state. Since the Muslims were given permission to trade in the king's land, they like the fisher folk had to undertake trading activities on behalf of the king. The trade in areca which was royal monopoly was entrusted to the *madige badda* and both Muslims and the fisher folk traded on the same terms. Each *mohandiram* received from the treasury 300 *ridi* as an advance for the purchase of areca and was obliged to return six hundred. The money was distributed among the people under his purview. They went from house to house collecting the nuts which grew wild around each homestead. Since the trade in areca was a royal monopoly, the prices were low; the villagers having only two alternatives; either to sell the nuts to the king's traders at the nominal price fixed by the latter or to let the nuts rot under the trees. These were taken on pack oxen to Ruvanvalla on the Dutch border and sold to the Colombo market and the profits accounted to the treasury²⁹. If they could escape the vigilant eye of the Hollander, the traders could take the areca to Puttalam of Chilaw, barter it for cloth and dried fish with the South Indian merchants and bring these commodities to the villager's doorstep.

In order to make a better deal, the Muslim traders, when they received the cash from the treasury would go to the coastal towns of Puttalam and Chilaw and buy salt, dried fish and cloth and then barter these articles for areca in the four Korales where the nuts were plentiful. The nuts were sold at Ruvanvalla for the Colombo market or taken to Puttalam and Chilaw and sold to Indian merchants, thus deriving a bargain at both ends.

An interesting anecdote is related about a Muslim trader of Kandy. Kalu Lekama, who borrowed three hundred *ridi* from the treasury to trade, on the understanding that he would pay a stipulated sum per annum as interest. He defaulted payment and was brought to the king, Kirti Rajasinha. The debtor was taken into custody severely chastised and a part of the debt recovered.³⁰

The business acumen of the Muslims, their possession of oxen, their itinerant habits was all utilised to serve the needs of the state through the organisation known as the *madige*. The Muslim connection with the *madige* which is revealed in early British sources is confirmed by the names of several Muslim villages which have survived to this day. For instance, the village known as Uda Talavinna on the Kandy-Kurunegala, road, has adjacent to it a village solely occupied by Muslims named Uda Talavinna Madige.

In this village today there are three mosques, approximately 700 houses and 3000 people, who still cherish the memory of their connection with the *madige* and their services to the Sinhalese kings. According to a tradition recorded by A.C.Lawrie,³¹ the Muslims had been living in Uda Talavinna Madige for over 250 years. Hapugaslande Muhandiram, a Muslim of Lawrie's day reported that his great grandfather purchased land in this village about 1720, (that is in the reign of Narendrasinha 1707-1739). There was a conspiracy against the king, during which the said predecessor remained loyal and as a reward his land was declared free of *rajakariya*. It is worthy of note how a handful of Muslims have lived for so long in an isolated village, where transport and communications are so difficult that they would have had little opportunity of contact with any other Islamic community, surrounded on all sides by Sinhala villagers who are devoutly Buddhist, maintaining very cordial relations, and also their Islamic identity. When questioned the villages replied that no pressure was ever brought and no incentives were ever offered to them or their ancestors to shake their allegiance to their faith. Instead their talents, skill and resources were used to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. Although with the breakdown of the tenurial system and the monetisation of the economy, the Muslims have taken to diverse professions, yet the lasting effects of structural assimilation are still visible.

Many such villages bearing the name *madige* or *madige gama* (madige village) are still found in the Kandyan areas. If the term *madige* is applied to it, it is always inhabited by Muslims and the villagers are aware that the lands were granted

to them centuries ago by the Kandyan kings in return for service, though many are uncertain regarding the nature of the service, Adjacent to the village of Galagedara which is eleven miles from Kandy on the Kandy – Kurunegala road there are two villages, Galagedara Madigegama and Dehideniya Madigegama occupied only by Muslims. All the surrounding villages are Sinhala Buddhist and in the immediate vicinity of the *madige* villages there are three Buddhist temples. One of them, the Petigevala Raja Maha Viharaya is 300 years old. Its incumbent Ullanupitiye Siri Pemananda Nayaka There reported that the ancestors of the present day Muslims were settled in these lands by the Kandyan kings and ordered to perform transport service to the state. This information was confirmed by the Muslims residents as well.

In the Galagedara Madigegama there are about 1,300 people all Muslims and one mosque. Everyone is connected to the mosque and it is through this association that the *madige* villagers maintained their Islamic identity in an intensely Buddhist environment. There is a Board of eleven members which is responsible for the affairs of the mosque, such as selecting of a priest, conducting of services and matters dealing with the laity. All disputes are first taken to this board and only if the board fails to arrive at a settlement are they taken to a regular court of law. The business of the board is taken up after the Friday prayer. It is obligatory for every Muslim to attend this prayer unless special permission is granted or on pain of a fine. Thus Islamic influence emanates from the mosque and pervades the entire congregation, differentiating it ideologically from the neighbouring population. In this manner the cultural identity of the Islamic communities was preserved, while the mechanism of the *madige badda*, linked them to the Kandyan body politic. The flexibility of Kandyan institutions which absorbed extraneous elements, the tolerant attitude of the Kandyan kings and people towards other faiths facilitated the process of structural assimilation in the Udarata.

Muslims as functionaries in the Dalada Maligava or the Temple of the Tooth

Within the complex religious establishment of the Kandyan kingdom there were four separate systems, with their affiliations embracing the entire country. At the apex was the Temple of the Tooth (Dalada Maligava), enshrining the Tooth Relic of the Buddha which was regarded by the king and people as the insignia of royalty, conferring on its owner substantial claim to the sovereignty of the country. The ritual of the Dalada Maligava is different from that of any other Buddhist temple in the island and resembles that of a Hindu Shrine.³²

Next there were the Buddhist monastic establishments or *viharas*, where the bhikkhus lived. The two main institutions, Malvatta and Asgiriya were situated in Kandy, while the others were scattered all over the country. Co-existing with the *viharas* and very often housed in the same precincts were the *devales* or shrines dedicated to Hindu deities, exemplifying the peaceful synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism. The situation of the principal *devales*, dedicated to the four chief deities, namely Visnu, Nata, Kataragama and Pattini, in the heart of the city, in close proximity to the Temple of the Tooth, further illustrates this fusion. Loosely affiliated to the four chief *devales*, there were other *devales* scattered over the kingdom housing one or the other of the four deities. These deities had been, in the course of time incorporated into the Buddhist fold and made subservient to the Buddha³³.

The three systems represent developments in Sri Lankan Buddhism and its evolution form a "godless creed" of individual salvation to one of immense socio-political involvement. All three systems were state sponsored and together formed the national religion of the country. The fourth system which received no state recognition comprised of the pre-Buddhist animistic cults, which acquired in the course of time, a Buddhist flavour.³⁴

The king gave generous grants of land for the support of the religious institutions. When the king granted a village to the Dalada Maligava it became a *maligagama*; if granted to a monastery it became a *viharagama* and if granted to a devale it became a *devalegama*.

The gifting of lands by the king was not an absolute bestowal of the lands, but rather a resignation in favour of the grantee, of the services which the hereditary holders owed to the king as lord of the soil. The grantee received only that portion of the village which was reserved for the owner, the *muttettu* which was equivalent to the lord's demesne in European feudalism. The *muttettu* consisted roughly of about one fifth or one sixth of the village and its produce were used for the consumption of the donee. All the other cultivable land outside the *muttettu* was divided into *nilapangu* or service shares, each of which had a specialised service attached to it. The *pangukaraya* or shareholder who cultivated it had to render that service, to the landlord, as rent for living on the land. For instance, whoever occupied the *hevisi panguva* (a drummer's share) had to provide the music at the temple festivals. Since service depended on the caste of the individual it follows that only persons of the drummer caste occupied the *hevisi panguva*.

In this manner, the services of the share holders were transferred to the religious institution so that the labour needed for maintaining that institution, such as cooking, cleaning, security services, dancing, music and attendance at festivals were all supplied. Thus the king maintained all religious organisations and won the loyalty of the *sangha* by generous grants of land. This system has to be viewed in the context of a situation where land was plentiful, population scanty and hence labour scarce and the economy largely non-monetary.

The Muslims were involved in the functioning of these systems on the same basis as they served the king. The Dalada Maligava owned extensive lands called *maligagam* and the administration of these was entirely in the hands of a lay officer called the *diyavadana nilame*, appointed by the king from the *radala* aristocracy. The occupants of the *maligagam* were tenants of the *diyavadana nilame* and they served each according to his caste, to maintain the elaborate daily ritual and the periodic ceremonies connected with the relic. The daily ritual consisted of three services held at dawn, morning and evening and on Wednesdays a special ritual was held.

There were also found annual festivals observed at every shrine including the *Maligava*, namely, New Year (April), New Rice (January), which was a harvest festival, *Karti* (November), which is a festival of lights and the *Asala* (July) festival which took the form of a national pageant. In addition to these, provisions had to be supplied, the building, furniture and all utensils had to be maintained, transport had to be provided and diverse other services rendered for the functioning of this complex³⁵. In a largely non-monetary economy all these services were paid for by grants of land.

The Service Tenure Register of the Kandy district prepared in 1872³⁶, gives the names of several Muslims who were occupying service shares belonging to the *Maligava* in return for service. The services rendered by the Muslims were of a varying nature ranging from cultural practices such as drumming which was considered a “low caste” function to offices of a very honourable nature performed only by higher ranks of the *govikula*.

Two Muslims, Mohammed Lebbe and Udum Lebbe occupied the *lunudena panguva* (the share that supplies salt) of the village of Pallegampaha Kahavatta belonging to the *Dalada Maligava*. The service attached to the share was to supply the *Maligava* with 20 measures of “good clean salt” for the New Year festival³⁷. The importance of this service will be appreciated when it is recalled that during the latter days of the Kandyan kingdom the Dutch were controlling the ports and attempting to restrict trade in essential items. The *Maligava* officials had to maintain sufficient stocks of salt as well as dried fish to feed the *Maligava* staff. The same share was responsible for presenting the *Diyavadana Nilame* with a dried fish and forty leaves of betel.

The offering of 40 leaves of betel (which is called a *bulathata* or a handful of betel) is a customary manner of showing respect to one’s superiors. This custom is still practised in Sri Lanka specially during the Sinhala New Year.

The supply of salt and dried fish could be considered as a purely utilitarian service rendered by the Muslims and involved no religious or cultural significance. However, it is interesting to note that there were considerable numbers of Muslims occupying *hevisipanguva* or drummer's share in the villages belonging to the Maligava.

For instance seven Muslims namely, Hema Lebbe, Panikkiyalagegedara Ungu, Isubu Lebbe, Ismail Lebbe, Meera Neina Omaru Lebbe, Ahamadu Kandu and Hema Pulle occupied the *hevisi panguva* of the village of Udagampaha Dippitiya belonging to the Dalada Maligava. The *rajakariya* due from them was to be present at the *Maligava* on the days of the four annual festivals and provide the drumming when the procession moved from the *Maligava* to the village of Gurudeniya. They had also to drum at the *Vesak Puja*, which is the ceremony connected with the birthday of the Buddha. Further, they had to appear before the Diyavadana Nilame on New Year's Day and present him with 40 leaves of betel and a pingo load of vegetables.³⁸

According to the unwritten rules of the caste system, although anyone can drum from for pleasure only a person of the drummer caste (*berava or pannikki*) could play the drum at a temple festival, No other person's drumming was considered ritual or ceremonial.³⁹ How then did the Muslims who were outside the pale of the Sinhala caste system drum at the Maligava ceremonies? The author had the opportunity of discussing this with Dr. Nissanka Wijeyaratne, who once held the office of Diyavadana Nilame. He suggested that they many have belonged to a family of Sinhala drummers who were converted to Islam. This is a plausible explanation since one of the Muslims had the family name Panikkiyalagegdara (belonging to the house of the drummer) prefixed to his personal name. It is likely that a Muslim migrant married a woman of the drummer caste and settled down in her parental land. Their offspring many have inherited the father's name and faith and the maternal land and *rajakariya* attached to it. It is interesting to note that another drummer's share of the Dalada

Maligava was occupied by Panikkiyalagegedera Siripina, a Sinhalese who provided the music at shrine.⁴⁰

The significant feature is that the Muslims were involved in the traditional ritual of the Buddhist establishment. Michael Roberts, discussing the absorption of migrant groups into Sinhala society states, "The roles to which they were assigned did not carry ritual meaning. They were utilitarian roles of instrumental value to the state. Nor were these caste roles linked closely with the traditional corpus of ritual and patron client relationships, whether those connected with familial rites of passage, monastic lands or religious ceremonies. In this context it is significant that the handful of *karava* who had penetrated to the interior and resided in the Kandyan kingdom were required to perform the same services as the Marakkala or Moors-another marginal group long resident in agricultural settlements within the Kandyan country⁴¹.

Roberts bases his conclusion solely on John Davy's description of the Moors and their services. Davy only mentions the fact that the Moors provided oxen for transport and paid a tax of dried fish and salt to the state.⁴² The evidence of the Service Tenures Register, however, clearly indicates that the Muslims were incorporated into the traditional system of inter-caste relationships and ritual services to shrines.

Nevertheless, there was an anomalous situation with regard to the shares (*pangu*) held by Muslims and the type of service they rendered, showing that they had not crystallised into a regular caste having a fixed vocation. There were Muslims occupying the *badal panguva* (smith's share) of the village of Medapalatha Munwathugoda belonging to the Dalada Maligava. They were Harispattuwa Gurunnehelagegedera Omaru Lebe, H.G. Ahamadu Lebbe and H.G. Cader Lebbe and the *rajakariya* they rendered to the Maligava were those of the smith or *acari* caste, namely, to clean the silver and gold vessels used at the *Maligava*; to contribute the labour for making and repairing every gold and silver article needed at the *Maligava*; to appear before the *diyavadana nilame* twice a year

with a silver article and a sheaf of betel leaves. They were thus incorporated into the *Maligava* ritual and interlinked in the web of social relationships, the elements of which were homage, service and landholding.

The instances given above represent the Muslims as performing low cast services to the *Maligava* such as drumming and metal craft. It is clear from the Service Tenure Register that there were Muslims who were appointed to the responsible post of *kariya karavanarala* (literally, the officer who gets the work done) of the *Diyavadana Nilame*. He was Chief-of-Staff, Administrator of Ritual and was appointed by the *Diyavadana Nilame*, usually from among the *govikula* families that held land by virtue of supplying the *Maligava* with some particular service. These shares were known as *kariya karavana mura*. The duties of *kariyakaravana rale* are (1) to be in charge of the foodstuffs, fruits and oil which he doles out daily to the officials in charge of the kitchen, (2) accepts the pingo loads of rice, vegetables, oil and other produce of the *maligava* lands which are brought in by the headmen of the villages, (3) to be in charge of the ritual objects of the temple like flags, ceremonial dresses, traditional arms, torches, umbrellas and trappings of elephants, (4) to remind the *maligava* tenants of the forthcoming festivals on which they are expected to serve.⁴³

Thus he has a key role play at the festivals in the sense that he directs all other functionaries in performing their duties. Further, he has ceremonial duties of a very honourable nature such as saluting the *Diyavadana Nilame* and informing his about the commencement of the *perahara* and taking the relic casket from the hands of the *Diyavadana Nilame* and placing it on the cushion.

The Service Tenure Register gives the names of five Muslims who occupied two shares in Medapalatha and Medapalatha Munvatugoda in return for rendering the service of *kariya karavanarala*. They were polvatte Muhandiramlagegedara Ismail Lehbbe, Polvatte Mahamdiramlage Madara Lebbe, Harispattuwa Gurunnahelagegedara Ahamadu Lebbe, Munaladeniye

Gurunnhelagegedara Ismail Lebbe and Kalugamuva Gurunhehelagegedara Uduma Lebbe. The duties expected from the officer during his one year tenure of office are laid down. Also his obligations when out of office are stipulated because he will still be occupying the same land. He had to continue to attend the four annual festivals as well as the ceremonies connected with Vesak, the birth anniversary of the Buddha. Attendance at festivals was important not only as an expression of loyalty but also because retinue was a highly prized status symbol in the Kandyan kingdom. Further, the *ex-kariya karavana rala* had to provide meals to the *Diyavadana Nilame* whenever the latter visited the service village. The supplying of *adukku* (meals or cooked food) and *pahidun* (dry rations) was the Kandyan system of providing subsistence allowance to government officials travelling on duty. Lands were specially allocated for this purpose and those who occupied these lands had to look after the needs of the official visitors. Whereas dry rations could be accepted from anyone, only persons of the highest caste were privileged to provide meals to the *Diyavadana Nilame* for the latter will not condescend to accept food from anyone of lesser calibre. When Polwatte Mohandiramlage gedara Ismail Lebbe played host to the *Diyavadana Nilame*, it meant that the latter accepted the former as a caste equal, for commensality was a sure sign of equality of status.

It is clear from the forgoing that Muslims were involved in the administrative and ritual aspects of the functioning of the *Dalada Maligava*. In the case of the Muslim *kariya karavana rala*, it was the organisational and administrative competence of the appointee that was considered and not religious or racial issues. The Muslims being outside the Sinhala caste structure were assigned various functions, high and low depending on the skills and talents of the persons concerned. As far as the Muslims were concerned their works at the *Dalada Maligava* were not acts of worship but merely payment of rent, for the land they occupied. Nevertheless, the whole system fostered co-operation and harmony between all groups of society.

The Muslims and the administration of the Viharas or Buddhist monasteries

Islam demands from its believers, strict adherence to its tenets to the total exclusion of all other faiths. The Kandyan Muslims were allowed to practise their religion freely and they remained true to their faith, but they had the flexibility and adaptability to fit into the mechanism of the Buddhist monastic system, with no prejudice to their Islamic beliefs. As we have seen the land given to the monastery of *viharagama* was occupied by shareholders rendering service to the vihara and some of them were Muslims. The *vihara* system in its practical working necessitated the harmonious integration of the various elements in society. The Muslims who differed from the majority people in race and religion were welded into this mechanism for mutual benefits, demonstrating the adjustability of the Muslims, the accommodating nature of Kandyan institution and the tolerance of the Buddhists, especially at a time when religious bigotry was the order of the day. Obviously, no attempt was made by the *bhikkhus* to convert the Muslims living in the temple lands, instead their skills and resources were used for the benefits of the *vihara*.

The Muslims, as we have seen were mainly traders and owned pack oxen. Accordingly, we find the Muslim tenants of the temple lands, very often occupying the *patavili pangu* or transport shares. Their main obligation towards the *vihara* was to transport grain from the fields to the granary and also to supply salt and dried fish which they brought from the coast. A fine example where this healthy relationship evolved and traces of which are visible even today in the ancient Ridi Vihara in the Kurunegala. This Vihara benefited greatly from the munificence of the Kandyan Kings and had seven villages belonging to it. One of them, Rambukandana was wholly a Muslim village. The services rendered and the dues paid by each tenant are indicted in the Service Tenure Regitser.⁴⁴ These included transport of grain and white sand for the decoration of the temple premises, supplying of certain dry rations mainly coconuts and dried fish and the payment of minor cash dues.

A gesture which could be considered magnanimous even by modern standards is that the *bhikkhus* of the Ridi Vihara had given a part of the *viharagama* for the erection of a mosque and also allocated a portion of the land for the maintenance of a Muslim priest. Here were Muslim tenants performing without reluctance, service to a Buddhist *vihara*, and that *vihara* freely supporting a Muslim priest to look after the spiritual needs of the Muslim tenants. In 1870, the British Service Tenure Commissioners were struck by this case of remarkable religious tolerance, unique in the annals of religion.⁴⁵ The author was informed by the present incumbent of the Ridi Vihara, Tibbotuvave Sri Siddhartha Sumangala Nayaka Thero, that the mosque still stands half a mile away from the temple on land that once belonged to the Ridi Vihara – a monument to the spirit of religious tolerance that prevailed. The whole socio-economic structure has now crumbled but the goodwill and cordiality continues.

U.N. Asana Lebbe, at present a member of the District Development Council of Kurunagala and a respected citizen of Rambukandana, testified that in 1930 many Muslim boys received their education in Buddhist monasteries, some of them living in the temple as long as ten years. Many of them studied Sinhala and indigenous medicine. Although education was always free and so were board and lodging in the temple, the *bhikkhus* made no attempt to convert their wards. Facilities were provided for the Muslims boys to say their prayer and attend Koranic classes while living in the Buddhist temple.

In this remote village where secularisation and modernisation have not yet eroded traditional values, Muslims make voluntary contributions towards the *vihara* and Muslim boys participate as a group in the temple festivals, specially in the *Asala Perahara*. Whenever their help is needed the *bhikkhu* informs the Muslim priest who makes arrangements to provide the personnel. It is no longer obligatory service, the line of service tenure has snapped, yet the spirit of respect and tolerance has not yet died down. U.N.Asana Lebbe stated that the drummers in the *perahara* would voluntarily stop the music

when moving past the mosque as a mark of respect through there is no sign board or orders to silence them.

As we have seen Akurana was one of the oldest Muslim settlements in the udarata. The Asgiri Aluth Vihara in Kandy owned extensive lands in Akurana and there were Muslim families occupying some of the shares. As usual the Muslims living in the *lunudena panguva* supplied the salt and dried fish. Other shareholders supplied a pingo load of vegetables a month to the *vihara* and after New Year each one presented the chief *bhikkhu* with a pingo load of vegetables and forty leaves of betel. It is interesting to note that Abubakr Lebbe Vedarala, a Muslim physician who was a shareholder of the temple land, gave annually to the chief *bhikkhu* of Asgiri Aluth Vihara a cash gift and one tobacco leaf.⁴⁶ The tobacco leaf was an accompaniment to betel chewing and in this manner even the minutest needs of the *bhikkhus* were looked after. Even more important was the fact that the compulsory *penuma* (literally, appearance) of the shareholder on New Year's Day with customary gifts to the chief *bhikkhu* strengthened the feeling of inter-dependence between the "monastic landlord" and his tenants both Muslim and non Muslim.

The cases of the Ridi Vihara in Kurunegala and the Asgiri Aluth Vihara in Kandy are just two examples to show the Muslims who were recent migrants, and aliens in race and religion were not admitted to Kandyan society on disadvantageous conditions. Wherever there were Muslims occupying temple lands they rendered service to the temple and became a part of the system, and whenever there was a sizeable number of Muslims, land was allocated either by the *bhikkhus* or the king for the construction of a mosque to serve their spiritual needs. The mosque at Pangollamada was built on land belonging to the Degaldoruva vihara. The present Katupalliya and Miramakkam mosque in Kandy were built on land gifted by the Kandyan kings. The Katupalliya resembles architecturally, the Audience Hall of the Dalada Maligava, while its carved wooden pillars are reminiscent of the Embakke Devale. The typically Kandyan wooden doorway of the mosque with heavy brass fittings and a Koranic inscription on top,

epitomises the prevailing spirit and reminds the onlooker that religion could be a unifying factor. It is evident from Knox's penetrating study that as far back as the seventeenth century the Kandyan Kings donated lands for the maintenance of mosques on the same basis as they gave land to the *viharas*; but instead of obligatory service, the tenants contributed money for its upkeep. There were instances when charitable Sinhala people gifted land to the Muslims to erect places of worship. Robert Knox, who had every reason to dislike the king, Rajasinha II (1635-1687) and his people, states: "Nor are they charitable to the poor of their own nation, but as I said to others; and particularly to the Moorish beggars, who are Mohametans by Religion. They have a temple in Kandy. A certain former king gave this temple this Priviledge, that every freeholder should contribute a Ponnam to it. They come very confidently when they beg, and they say they come to fulfil that peoples' charity, and the people do liberally relieve them for charity sake. The Moor pilgrims have many pieces of land given them by well disposed persons out of charity, where they build houses and live. And this land becomes theirs from generation to generation for ever."⁴⁷

The tradition connected with the Kahatapitiya mosque near Gampola further illustrates the munificence of the Sinhala kings towards the Muslims. The site where the mosque now stands was a waste land with a few trees. According to tradition an ascetic from Mecca sat here in mediation and his dignified motionless posture struck the attention of a toddy tapper who had come to tap the palm tree. In order to ascertain whether this figure was alive or dead, the tapper is said to have sliced off the tip of his nose. The ascetic remained motionless. The following morning the toddy tapper was astonished to see the piece he had cut-off re-attached to the nose. The tapper was overawed and related his experience to the Gampola king, who visited the ascetic and asked him what he needed "Only a strip of land to lay my head on," was the reply. When the king wished to know the extent required, the ascetic threw his bangle called the *Sakkara valalla* in four directions and indicated the area. This was granted and the area is still known as Sakkarankotuva.

The saint Bhavakauf was deified and a tomb was built in his memory. Later a mosque sprang up on the same place and it continues to be a well known place of pilgrimage.⁴⁸ This is further evidence that even before the repressive measures of the Portuguese and Dutch began the Kandyan king and people showed remarkable tolerance towards the Muslims (as well as towards all other faiths) even to the extent of providing for their spiritual needs and it was this gesture of goodwill which facilitated a small minority to maintain its religious and cultural identity amidst an alien population.

The Muslims and the administration of the Devalas or Hindu Shrines

The peaceful integration of the Muslims into the functioning of the *devalas* stands in striking contrast to the violent Hindu-Muslim rivalries and religious wars which were rampant in the neighbouring sub-continent at the time. The co-existence of *viharas* and *devalas* in the same premises both recognised and supported by the state was the culmination of a process of synthesization that was going on in the island for centuries. It reached a climax in the reign of the last four kings of Kandy (1739-1815) who were of South Indian origin, and Hindus till their accession to the throne. The Hindus and Buddhists having lived in the island for centuries saw no conflict between the two systems; although in theory the two served two different needs and were served by two different religious specialists.

In the case of Islam no such ideological synthesizing ever took place. Instead the Muslims as a group became attached to the functioning of *devala* structure, which was strengthened by their skills and resources. The Kandyan king granted lands for the upkeep of the *devalas* and these were called *devalagam*. These lands were administrated by a *basnayake nilame*, appointed by the king from among the highest ranks of the *govikula*. He was the chief lay officer in charge of the shrine. As in the case of the *viharas* there were Muslim tenants occupying *devala* lands.

For instance the village of Pamunuva belonged to the famous Galdaladeniya *devala*, which in turn was a part of the Gadaladeniya *Vihara* complex. The Muslims in Pamunuva occupied the *lunudena panguva* and they were obliged to contribute annually fourteen *seruvas* of salt towards the maintenance of the *devala* staff.⁴⁹ Even more noteworthy in this respect is the case of Ahamadu Lebe of Dodandeniya (a village in Udunuvara, a west of Embakke), which was a part of the land belonging to the well-known Embakke *Devala*. Judging from the services he had to render, the *lebbe* was an eminent man in the area. It was said earlier that all obligatory services performed towards the state or religious institution was based on the caste of the performer. The tenants who belonged to the *govikula* did not perform any specialised professional service; instead they had to be present on ceremonial occasions and attend on the *basnayake nilame* when he came to the village. Ahamadu Lebbe had to perform the very honourable service of being present at the *devala* ceremonies and also making his appearance on fifteen days of the annual *perahera* or procession in addition to supplying buffaloes for ploughing, iron implements and clay tiles to the *devala*.⁵⁰ Obviously Ahamadu Lebbe considered it a matter of pride and prestige to be associated with the *devala* ceremonial, and the *devala* authorities in turn were honoured by the presence of Ahamadu Lebbe in their midst. This is striking example of the policy of live and let live characteristic of Sinhala society at the time. Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists were voluntary participants in the festivities of the Embakke *devala* and none of those groups lost their cultural identity in the process.

It would appear to a casual observer that Muslim participation in idolatrous festivals was un-Islamic acts. The Muslims of the day were no doubt aware that their involvement in the administration and ritual of the Buddhist and Hindu shrines were not acts of worship but obligations to the state and hence in no way eroded their religious beliefs.

H.L. Seneviratne⁵¹ has shown that there were two kinds of worship performed in the *Dalada Maligava*, and this applied to many of the larger religious institutions in the Kandyan

Kingdom. One kind of worship were the voluntary acts of pious devotees who offer food, flowers, incense, lamps etc. and who are motivated only by spiritual objectives.

The second kind of worship is performed by those appointed and paid for the purpose by the state. They were not devotees or pilgrims but officials and functionaries. None of these paid officials, whether he was the Buddhist *Diyavadana Nilame* or the Muslims chief-of-staff; or whether he was Siripina the Buddhist drummer or Isubu Lebbe the Muslim drummer was inspired by purely spiritual motives. He was only paying his dues on the land he held. When a Muslim tenant living in the *patavoli panguva* supplied salt and dried fish to the Asgiri Aluth Vihara he was not giving alms or *dane* to the bhikkhus; he was only paying rent for living on the *vihara* lands. As far as he was concerned it was not an act of charity. The Muslims of the day understood the subtleties of the system and did not therefore feel that their religious susceptibilities were hurt or that their faith was endangered in any way. On the other hand they had much to gain.

By their involvement in the ceremonial of the *Dalada Maligava* and the principal *devalas*, the Muslims became associated with the *Diyavadana Nilame* and *Basnayaka nilames* who were royal appointees from the highest rungs of the Kandyan aristocracy. By marching in the *perahara*, specially the *Asala Maha Perahara* which was a national pageant, rubbing shoulders with the highest in the land, public attention was focused on them and their prestige and influence was automatically enhanced. Even Isubu Lebbe, the humble drummer gained in status, for the highest aspiration of any drummer, whether Buddhist or Muslim was to drum at the *Asala* festival. The frequent visits to the temple as purveyors of essential items brought the Muslims into close touch with the chief *bhikkhus*, who were kith and kin with the nobility and influential at every level of society.

The influence and goodwill thus generated was very useful for the Muslims to survive in an alien environment and also to carry on their trade. Further the harmonious relationship

resulted in the strengthening of the Islamic communities. It was seen that the *bhikkhus* and people provided the facilities and resources to the Muslims to continue their religious practices. It was with the co-operation of the state, the *sangaha* and the people that the Muslims preserved their separate identity. Hence there was no tension as in some Muslim minority countries between the desire to remain a separate, cohesive, Islamic group and the social and economic need to integrate with the majority group. For instance the Chinese Muslims were subjected to two contradictory pressures; the pressure of the assimilatory factory pushing them to acculturate to the Chinese majority culture and the pressure of the cultural specific pulling them to preserve the core of their culture and identity as Muslims. As long as the balance between the two could be maintained, Chinese Muslim society had adequate mechanism for keeping chronic stress at a tolerable level.⁵² This stress situation did not arise in Sri Lanka for there was no conflict between the two pressures; the more the Muslims were associated with the Kandyan socio-economic system the more their Islamic identity was accepted, respected and as we have seen, strengthened. Hence the Sinhala-Muslim relationship was not one of “uneasy coexistence” but one of coexistence.

It must be said to the credit of the Muslims that they tried their best to conform to the general culture and patterns of the majority community as far as this did not conflict with their Islamic ideals. As we have seen they fitted easily into the complex socio-economic system of the Kandyan kingdom bringing mutual benefit. Although there is no direct evidence to prove it, it is certain that the Muslims abstained from the slaughter of cattle at least within the limits of the kingdom. Ibn Batuta relates the story of Shaikh Usman of Shiraz, the Muslim priest, who had his hands and feet cut off for slaughtering a cow.⁵³ He escaped with this lenient treatment for an offence which was normally punishable by death because he was held in high esteem by the king. This event took place in the fourteenth century and it is almost certain that the offence was never repeated because if it was, friction would certainly have followed between the Buddhists and Muslims.

The Muslim men adopted the outward appearance, dress and manner of the Sinhalese. Even a keen observer like Reverend James Cordiner who spent five years in Sri Lanka (1799-1804) could not see the difference and refers to the Muslims as “the Cingalese who profess the religion of Mohamet”.⁵⁴

The absence of sharp ineffable racial differences made visible by skin colour or even dress would certainly have contributed to easy social intercourse. These were many Muslim men in Kandyan villages till recent times who followed the typically Sinhalese style of tying up their hair in a bun or *konde* behind, a style not usual among Muslims elsewhere. However their desire to look like their neighbours never superseded their desire to remain devout Muslims for while the men adapted Sinhala dress, women strictly adhered to purdah. “Their women are scarcely ever seen by strangers. When a man wants to transport his wife from one place to another, if he cannot find a palanquin he places her cross legged upon a bullock completely covered with a white cloth so that not a practice of her could seen, nor can she see where she is going. Her husband walks by her side,” writes Reverend James Cordiner.⁵⁵ The women strictly adhered to Koranic injunctions regarding dress even after centuries of association with the Sinhalese among whom the seclusion and veiling of women is unknown. Thus, though the Muslims were responsive to the demands of the host culture they stopped short of total acculturation.

NOTES

1. "Two ola grants of the seventeenth century" by T.B. Pohath in *J.R.A.S.C.B.* Vol. XVIII, No.54, 1903, pp. 10-16.
2. For details of the Kandyan administrative system, see, John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom*, also L.S. Dewaraja, *The Kandyan Kingdom 1707-1782*, 1988 chaps X and XI.
3. *Raja* = royal and *kariya* = duty.
4. L.S. Dewaraja, *op. cit.* p.223-24.
5. Robert Knox, pp. 233-34.
6. B.M. Or 6603 (65).
7. L.S. Dewaraja, pp. 218-223.
8. Tikiri Abeysinghe, p. 72.
9. Ralph Pieris *Sinhalese Social Organisation*, Colombo. 1955, p.99.
10. A.L. Kroeber, *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.
11. Ralph Pieris, *op.cit.* pp. 169-192; L.S. Dewaraja, pp. 53-66.
12. L.S. Dewaraja, p. 228-230.
13. Ralph Pieris, p.p. 184-186.
14. John Davy, *An Account of the Interior of Ceylon and of its Inhabitants with Travel in that Island*, Sri Lanka. 1983, p.92.
15. Michael Roberts, *Caste, Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of the Karave Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500 – 1931*, Oxford University Press, 1982, pp. 1-2, also see, Ralph

Pieris, "Caste, Ethos and Social Equilibrium", in *Social Fores*, Vol. 30, No. 4, 1952, pp. 409 – 415.

16. See p. 38-39.
17. Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organisation*, pp. 176 and 183.
18. John D'Oyly, p.25.
19. An *amunam* of land was the surface area over which an *amunam* of seed paddy could be sown. An *amunam* of paddy is equal to five bushels.
20. John D'Oyly, p. 25.
21. John D'Oyly, p. 92.
22. D'Oyly, p. 26.
23. *The Diary of Mr. John D'Oyly J.R.A.S.C.B.* Vol XXV. No. 69, 1917, p.114.
24. PRO/CO/416/20 folio 375.
25. The Diary of Mr. John D' Oyly 1917, p. 141.
26. Robert Know, p. 386.
27. John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom*, p. 25.
28. Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organisation*, p. 172.
29. John D'Oyly *op. cit.* p. 25.
30. PRO/CO/416/19 folio 203.
31. A.C. Lawrie, *A Gazetteer of the Central Province of Ceylon*, Two volumes, 1896 and 1898. Ceylon p. 808.

32. For details see, A.M. Hocart, *The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy, Memories of the Archaeological Survey of Ceylon*, Vo. IV. 1931.
33. See Hans Dieter Evers, "Buddha and the Seven Goods The dual organization of a temple in Central Ceylon" in *the Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXVII, No. 3, May, 1968, pp. 541 – 550.
34. S. Paranavitana, "Pre Buddhist religious beliefs in Ceylon". J.R.A.S.C.B., Vol. XXXI, No. 82.
35. Regarding the administration and ritual of the Dalada Maligava, see A.M. Hocart, *The Temple of the Tooth in Kandy* and H.L. Seneviratne, *Rituals of the Kandyan State*, Cambridge, 1978.
36. Service Tenures Register, Kandy, Vols, I, II, 1872, Manuscript found in the Kandy Kaccheri.
37. STR of the Dalada Maligava Services due from Harispattuva p. 695.
38. STR of the Dalada Maligava Services due from Harispattuva p. 735.
39. H.L. Seneviratne, op. cit. p.27; Ralph Pieris, *Sinhalese Social Organisation*, p. 174.
40. STR, p. 365.
41. Michael Roberts, op. cit. p. 234-235.
42. John Davy, p. 92.
43. H.L. Seneviratne, p.30.
44. PRO/CO/57/51. Report of the STC for 1870, p. 285.
45. Ibid.
46. STR p. 730.

47. Robert Knox, p. 234.
48. *J.R.A.S.C.B.* Vol. XVIII, No. 54, 1903, pp. 10-16.
49. A.C. Lawrie, *A Gazetteer of the Central Provinces of Ceylon*, pp. 238-241 A seruva is equal to four cups.
50. A.C. Lawrie, p. 678.
51. H.L. Seneviratne, *op. cit.* p.26.
52. Raphael Israeli, *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation*, 1980, p. 5.
53. Ibn Batuta, *op. cit.* p. 214.
54. James Cordiner, p. 69.
55. James Cordiner, p. 139.

V.CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIETY

“In the unopened parts of the island and specially in the Eastern provinces this primitive practice still continues; and when travelling in these districts we have often encountered long files of pack bullocks toiling along the mountain paths; their bells tinkling musically as they moved; or halting during the noon day heat beside some stream in the forest; their burdens piled in heaps near the drivers who had lighted their cooking fires while bullocks were permitted to bathe and browse. The persons engaged in this wandering trade are chiefly Moors and the business carried on by them consists in bringing up salt from the government depots on the coast to be bartered with the Kandyans in the hills for native coffee; which is grown in small quantities round every house, but without systematic cultivation. This they carry down to the maritime towns and the profits are invested in cotton cloths and brass utensils; dried fish and other commodities with which the tavalams supply, the secluded villages of the interior.”¹

Emerson Tennent.

This is a picturesque description left by a British civil servant, of a caravan of Muslim traders. It has been suggested that the Muslims introduced to Sri Lanka the method of *tavalam* transport, which is really a desert caravan with the ox substituted for the camel. The Kandyan Kings did not favour the improvement of transport and communication, since the kingdom's inaccessibility was its best defence. When the adventurous Muslims penetrated into the interior they had to devise a method of transport that would suit the difficult terrain and with their memories of the caravans moving across the desert adopted the ox for the same purpose.²

Muslims and Kandyan Trade

It would be relevant at this stage to examine the trading patterns of the Kandyan kingdom, in which the Muslims were the chief intermediaries. It was seen that the Kandyan kings were not prepared to remain locked up on their mountain

stronghold and as they grew in power and influence in the seventeenth century they wished to pursue their trade policies as well as maintain their links with the outside world.

When the Dutch replaced the Portuguese on the seaboard, the Kandyans still controlled the ports of Kottiyar and Batticaloa on the East and Kalpitiya and Puttalam in the West, and through these they traded with Madura and the Coromandel, with the Muslims and a few Chetties³ acting as middlemen.⁴ Each of these ports served as an outlet for a different area of the Kingdom. Kottiyar⁵ near Trincomalee was the best harbour belonging to the King. There was a large bazaar a few miles inland at Kilivetty, where the exchange of commodities took place. Here there was a Royal Customs House where an officer collected dues on behalf of the king.⁶ At Kilivetty, John Pybus the British envoy⁷, met some Cholian⁸ merchants bringing gingelly seeds, beads and dried coconut to be sold to the inhabitants.⁹ From Kottiyar to Kandy there was a land route following the Mahaweli ganga frequented by caravans of Muslim traders taking commodities to and from. In 1762, Pybus on his way to Kandy from Trincomalee met a caravan of Muslims with twenty to thirty oxen loaded with bags of grain carrying it to the sea coast in exchange for salt.¹⁰ Those early trade routes leading from the heart of the country to the ports are relevant to our study, because Muslim settlements have emerged along these routes in the course of time. At a time when communications were poor it took several days for a *tavalam* consisting of several beasts of burden to reach its destination and hence the need arose not only for resting places at night, but also for midday stops near a stream where the hungry traders would cook their meals while the weary animals would graze and quench their thirst. These rest places became the nucleus of many Muslim settlements.

Pybus describes a few of the Muslim villages that he passed. One such village was Pangurana, consisting of about a dozen houses where the villages had some paddy land and about fifty to sixty head of cattle mainly buffaloes. Some of them had obviously settled down to agriculture sepecially because Pangurana was well situated for the purpose on the

bank of the Kaudualla Oya.¹¹ The village of Nugadammana, also situated on the river had about one dozen Muslim houses.¹² Another village mentioned by Pybus was Nikavatana consisting of 7 to 8 houses and 30 to 40 head of cattle.¹³ It is evident that by the latter half of the eighteenth century small Muslim communities had emerged along the trade routes to the interior. They consisted of at most a dozen houses and although trade was their main pre-occupation they cultivated paddy, wherever water was available. They reared cattle for transport and agricultural purposes. One of their industries was weaving coarse cloth for daily wear and this was a probably done by the women. Each family was obliged to pay a tax of a piece of cloth to the disava who lived in Kandy.¹⁴

It is clear from Pybus' account that even in 1762, the authority of the King of Kandy was strongly felt in areas around Trincomalee even among his Muslim and Tamil subjects. The headmen of Muttur summoned the villagers to perform *rajakariya* and some of them were assigned the duty of accompanying and attending on the King's guest, Pybus. Some had to carry the palanquin in which the envoy travelled and provide him provisions like rice and chicken. He spent the night in a house belonging to a Tamil family and this too was a part of their *rajakariya*. In this manner all the services that the King's guest needed were looked after by the headmen of the district till the envoy reached its boundary where the headmen of the next district took on the responsibility and so on till the visitor reached the capital.¹⁵

In the hinterland of Batticaloa, was Dighavapi, the granary of the Sinhala King from pre-Christian times. It was to this locality that Dutugemunu (101-77BC) despatched his brother Saddhatissa to direct agricultural works in readiness for his campaigns.¹⁶ The area fell into disuse after the collapse of the hydraulic civilisation, till Senarat, as we have seen settled large numbers of Tamils and Muslims in the area for the purpose of reviving paddy culture in preparation for his campaigns against the Portuguese. It developed into a major rice producing area and excess grain was taken from Batticaloa to other parts of the island where it was needed. There were

roads leading from Kandy to Batticaloa passing through Minipe and Vellassa and Muslim settlements arose along these routes. Hundreds of small boats or *sampans* used to sail into Kottiyar and Batticaloa showing that there was brisk trading activity with South India.

The populars and fertile Seven Korales had Puttalam and Kalpitiya as its outlets. The Muslim traders brought the produce of the Seven Korales mainly areca and rice on pack oxen to Puttalam and from there in small boats to Kalpitiya since the larger vessels that came from Madura and Tanjore usually stopped at Kalpitiya. There was a strong concentration of Muslims in the Puttalam, Kalpitiya coastal strip and one at least of the chieftains in this area, Kumara Vanniya was a Muslim. While he functioned under the *disava* or Governor of Puttalam, he had within his jurisdiction Sinhala and Muslim villagers.¹⁷

The south and south-west parts of the kingdom had no direct access to the sea since the European was established along the Western seaboard. Hence the exchange of commodities took place along the frontier towns of Ruvanvala, Sitavaka and Katuvana and there are several references to Muslim merchants with their *tavalam* transacting business in these border towns.¹⁸ At Ruvanvalla and Sitavaka the produce of the Kandyan Kingdom was available to the Colombo market and at Katuvana there was commerce with the trades in the South.

Muslim Physicians

Although it is generally believed that the Muslims are versed only in the arts of trade and commerce it will be seen that there were other areas in which they excelled, one of which was medicine. Certain Sri Lankan Muslim families had distinguished physicians among their members, who rose to pre-eminence in the profession. These *hakims* as they are called used to trace their ancestry to Arab migrants who came to Sri Lanka in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries bringing with them the medical and scientific knowledge prevalent in the

centres of Islamic learning in the West. In the light of recent discoveries it is possible that *Unani* medicine was known in Sri Lanka even earlier. It was seen that “Sassanian Islamic” storage jars approximately dating from the seventh to the ninth centuries had been found among the ruins of the ancient hospital site at Mihintale in Anuradhapura. It is possible that *Unani* drugs were imported to Sri Lanka from Arabia and Persian Gulf, in these containers. The popularity of the *Unani* system is proved by the fact that Sinhala kings welcomed the *hakims* who came to the country and endowed them with grants of land.

With the passage of time Ayurveda influenced the Unani system specially in the Kandyan areas and Ayurvedic herbs began to be employed in the Unani system.¹⁹ However, in some coastal towns like Colombo, Galle and Beruwala, Unani was practised more or less in its pure form. Reference has already been made to the Galle Vedarala or the physician from Galle, Sultan Kuttiya who was invited by the Kandyan King to his territory.

The most renowned among these medical practitioners were the Gopala Moors of Gatberiya in the Kegalle District. The village of Gataberiya where their descendants still live were presented to one of the early ancestors in recognition of medical aid rendered to an old resident. The family traces its pedigree to a great scholar *hakim*, a Royal physician of the Mawahadd Dynasty of Islamic Spain. He was born in 1110 AD in East Granada and his name was Abu Bakr Mohammed Ibu Abel Malik Abu Thufail al Madani. A graduate of the University of Cordova, he was the Chief Physician, Counsellor and Secretary of Caliph Abu Yahub Ibu Yoosuf of Morocco in 1165.²⁰ According to tradition two of his male descendents were living in a town called Gop in the province of Sind in Northern India. They were ordered by the Minister of the Delhi Sultan to proceed to Sri Lanka at the invitation of Parakramabahu II (1236-1270) of Dambadeniya.²¹ It is known that this king, a patron of learning and the celebrated author of *Kawsilumina* was afflicted, in his twenty second regnal year, by an incurable disease which made him stammer in speech and

ultimately relinquished his royal duties to a minister and later to his son.²² In such circumstances it is very likely that the king requested the Delihi Sultan to send the two Unani practitioners to attend on him. It has been suggested that the Sinhala kings named them 'Gopala' after the town of their residence²³ which was always used in their writing and grants distinguished them from all other Moore families in Sri Lanka. The Gopala Moors have remained staunch supporters of Sinhala royalty serving not only as physicians, but also as counsellors and generals. It seems likely that from the time of Parakramabahu II to Sri Vikrama Rajasingha (1796-1815), a Gopala Moor was in charge of the Royal Betge or Department of King's physicians. The descendants of the Gopala Moors are still known as Betae Udayar Nilames.

A former commissioner of Archaeology H.C.P. Bell had gathered the following tradition regarding the origin of the family.²⁴ It was reported that the two migrant Moors wished to marry Sinhala women but since they were foreigners they were unable to obtain women of noble birth. The King who earnestly wished the Muslims to remain in the kingdom devised a plan to obtain suitable wives for them. A number of girls from 10 to 12 years of age were summoned to the palace to perform the *avaduma* ceremony which was intended to bestow long life on the King. The Moors with royal connivance abducted two girls they fancied and hid them in the palace. The parents gave up the search for their daughters believing that they were lost. The girls were converted to Islam and given in marriage to the Moors. It is interesting to note that a similar episode is related regarding the origin of the Muslims of Akurana showing that at first the Muslims found difficulty in obtaining Sinhala spouses.

The Gopala Moors served the Kotte kings as well. A king of Kandy having heard of their medical skill requested one of them to attend on the ailing queen. To test their knowledge of medicine, the King is said to have adopted the following device. The patient was placed in a room so that the physician could not see her. He was not allowed to feel the pulse. Instead a string was fastened to a door bar inside the room and the other end was given to the physician with the intention of misleading

him. The physician felt the string and said that it had been tied to an inanimate object. After this it was tied to a dog and the physician immediately recognised that it was a beast. Fully satisfied with his skill the King ordered that the string be tied to the queen's wrist. On touching the other end of the string the physician diagnosed the disease, prescribed a remedy and the queen recovered. The king conferred on the physician the office of *Betge Mohandiram* (Head of the Department of Royal Physicians) and bestowed on him lands in Paranakuru Korale, Dumbara, Matale and Yatinuwara as nindagam, together with the title Vaidyatilaka Rajakaruna Gopala Mudaliya²⁵. There were 24 physicians attached to the *Betge* in attendance at the palace under the supervision of *Betge Mohandiruum* it is reasonable to assume that a number of them were Muslims.

Our sources are not specific regarding the name of the king in whose reign this event took place. However, after the bestowal of royal honours it is likely that many members of the family were encouraged to settle down in Kandy. In addition to their knowledge of medicine some of the Gopala Moors possessed veterinary skill and treated the King's elephants and horses.²⁶ They were also masters in the art of fencing. Some of them were acquainted with music and were members of the king's *kavikarra maduva* (organisation of court poets), and played the *vina*, a stringed instrument. From all this it is clear that they were closely associated with the king's household.

One of the Gopala Moors held the rank of General and Commander-in-chief of the Coast Defence in 1579 under vimaladharmasuriya 1. Paul E. Pieris writes that he was "the bravest of the Sinhalese officers. He was captured by the Portuguese and though 5000 pagodas were offered for his life he was executed. A Dutch record of 1669 mentions the name of Gopala Mudaliya and Mohottala of the Moors", immediately after that of Galagama Adigar, indicating the status the family had reached in the Kandyan hierarchy.

In the reign of Narendrasinha (1707-1739) the Gopala Moors incurred royal displeasure; some of their lands were confiscated and they were banished from Kandy. The reason for

this is not known, but it is possible that the Gopala Moors were suspected of being involved in one or other of the conspiracies that plagued Narendrasingha's reign. However, the set back was only temporary, for grant of 1747 in the next reign shows that the king gifted land in the fertile district of Siduruvana, Udunuvara to Rajapaksa Vaidyatilaka Gopala Mudaliyar for the great loyalty and faithfulness with which he served the king.²⁷

In the reign of Kirti Sri Rajasinghe (1747-1781) the name of Gopala Mudaliya figures prominently. A Catholic source informs us that in 1749 when the Catholic missionaries who were living in Kandy wished to get the King's permission to administer the sacraments to the Catholics living in the city, they sought the services of a "Muslim physician who was greatly accepted in the palace".²⁸ The physician was bribed by the missionaries to perform this service for them. This influential Moors was none other than the representative of the Gopala family, who at this time headed the King's *Betge*. Due to his interference the missionaries were allowed to enter Kandy to administer the sacraments.²⁹

Later in the same region Gopala Mudaliya rose to greater fame. In 1760 a conspiracy of a very serious nature was afoot to assassinate the King and place on the throne a Siamese adventurer who had arrived in the island in the guise of a *bhikkhu*. The conspiracy was hatched in the precincts of the Malvatta Vihara and its architects were the Second Adigar, Samanakkodi, the chief *bhikkhu* of the Malvatta Vihara and Moladanda Rala, an officer in the royal kitchen. The king received prior information regarding the attempt on his life from his faithful supporter Gopala Mudaliya. Overwhelmed by this act of loyalty, the king gave the Gataberiya copper plate *sannasa* rewarding Palkumbure Vaidyatilake Rajakaruna Gopala Mudaliya with the lands that once belonged to the rebel Moladanda.³⁰ The king's confidence in Gopala Mudaliya was justified for when his nobles and *bhikkhus* plotted against him it was his Muslim supporter who saved his life and it is reasonable to assume that the power and influence of the Muslims was enhanced since this incident.³¹

The original *sannasa* is still in the possession of a descendant of the family Al Haj S.M. Ahamed Udayar. The Gataberiya *Walawwa* where the *sannasa* was found still stands in the village of the same name, a modest but picturesque dwelling. In the name of H.C.P. Bell the oldest representative of the Gopala clan was the 70 year old Segu Madar Udayar of Gataberiya who had sustained the widespread reputation of the family as skilful physicians. People used to come from distant places to seek his medical advice. The present occupant of the Gataberiya *Walawwa*, 60 year old Muhammed Ibrahim Udayar recollects his father giving free treatment to all the patients who came to him. The prescriptions were all written in Sinhala. The medicinal works that he consulted were originally in Arabic but later translated into Sinhala.

Two other families directly descended from the Gopala Moors still live in the proximity of the Gataberiya *Walawwa*. In one household lives, Gopala Vaidyaratna Mudiyanseleage Yakub Udayar Mohammed Ibrahim Udayar (86) and his wife Paulat Umma (82). In the other household lives Vaidyatilaka Rajakaruna Gopala Mudiyanseleage Segu Abu Bakr Segu Mohammed Udayar, a retired principal of a school. He mentioned that his father was a specialist in skin diseases and had medical books written in Arabic, Sinhala and Tamil. Though of modest circumstances all these families cherish the memory of their illustrious ancestry. Both the Sinhala and Muslim villagers address the Gopala Moors as “Nilame” and “Menike” which are the most respectful terms used for Kandyan aristocracy.

The Muslim association with the royal *Betge* continued into the reign of Rajadirajasingha (1782-1798). In 1786 Buvalikada Vedaralalage Abubkr Pulle, who was a physician in the King’s *Betge* attended on the favourite secondary wife of the king Alugama Dugganna Unnanse and was rewarded with lands from Daskara.³²

During the reign of the last king of Kandy, Sri Vikrama Rajasingha (1798-1815), Rajakaruna Gopala Mudiyanseleage Ralahamy functioned as judge of the high Court, associated

with the ministers Pilima Talawwe and Ahalepola.³³ It is possible that in addition to his duties in the Betge, this officer had been assigned judicial functions. The above evidence makes it clear that throughout the reigns of the Kandyan monarchs, the Gopala Moors and other Muslim physicians were loyal and trustworthy subjects.

It is interesting to note that in the maritime provinces under Dutch and British occupation there were families of Muslim medical practitioners whose skills were recognised by the governments. The Dutch built hospitals for the purpose of serving their forces, shipping personnel and other Dutch nationals in the country. The premier hospital was in Colombo while there were smaller institutions in Galle, Jaffna, Matara, Trincomalee, Mannar, Batticaloa and Kalpitiya. Although no natives were allowed in these hospitals, the Dutch had a great admiration for local remedies and some of these were used in the hospitals. Hence the need arose for local physicians. In 1791, Mira Lebbe Mestriar Seka Marikkar and Sareek Lebbe were appointed as physicians.³⁴

Mira Lebbe Mestriar rose to greater fame when in 1806, Sri Alexander Johnstone, Chief Justice of His Majesty's Government in Ceylon appointed this Muslim physician as the Native Superintendent of the Medical Department under the control of the Supreme Court.³⁵ He was considered as the most knowledgeable of the native physicians of his day and his family possessed the rarest collection of indigenous medical books, which had been in the possession of the family for seven to eight hundred years. During this entire period of 8 centuries it was customary for at least one member of the family to practice the art of healing.

Mira Lebbe Mestriar was a dedicated researcher who compiled a detailed report of all the plants in Sri Lanka which had been used from time immemorial for medical purposes by Muslim physicians in the island. It was the interest taken by Mira Lebbe Mestriar that encouraged Sir Alexander Johnstone to suggest to the British government in 1810, the establishment of the Royal Botanic Gardens, the original purpose of which

was the cultivation and improvement of medical and edible plants for home consumption and commercial purposes.

According to another tradition the planning and inauguration of the Botanical Gardens was undertaken during the reign of one of the Gampola or Kandyan kings under the direct supervision of one of the Muslim physicians of the *Betge*.³⁶ One member of the family is said to have resided in the garden to supervise the various kinds of medicinal herbs and their cultivation. This tradition does not contradict the information we get from Johnstone's despatch. It is quite possible that the project commenced in the time of a Sinhala monarch with the assistance of a physician of the *Betge* and was perhaps neglected during the turmoil of the last days of Kandy and was revived by the British government, once again at the initiative taken by a Muslim physician. It is well known that the Sinhala kings took a special interest in the cultivation of medicinal herbs and trees.

The system of medicine that the Muslim physician practised in Sri Lanka is worthy of inquiry. A century or so in advance of the west there had grown up in the Muslim world at a number of centres, like Basra, Kufa, Baghdad, Cairo and Cordova, a series of universities, which had developed out of a number of religious schools attached to mosques. These institutions attracted students from the East and West. In many arts and sciences the Arabs built on the foundations of the Greeks. Two great names are Ar Razi (865-965) known as Rhazes in the West and Avicenna (Ibn-Sina) the Prince of Physicians (980-1037). The Arab surgeons understood the use of anesthetics and a book *Kitabuttasrif* gives illustrations of surgical instruments used by them.³⁷ H.C.P. Bell writing in 1892 states that the Gopala Moors of Gataberiya had in their possession, at the time of his writing, surgical instruments made of iron, steel and brass for excising wounds and cauterisation.³⁸

Despite their absorbing interest in trade, some of the Arabs who came to Sri Lanka brought with them fragments of the vast scientific knowledge of the Islamic world. Muslim priests and merchants frequently came to see Sir Alexander

Johnstone with extracts of Arabic translations of Aristotle, Euclid, Plato, Galen and Ptolemy. The owners had stated that these works had originally been procured in Baghdad by their ancestors' families. Johnstone referring to the wide knowledge of medicine of the Muslim physicians adds that among the premier medical books introduced to Sri Lanka was the renowned work of Ibn-Sina. Some of the present day descendants of Muslim medical families have in their possession palm leaf manuscripts written in Arabic interspersed with Sinhala and Tamil verse.

Muslims as envoys of the King

The Muslims of the Kandyan kingdom served the king in several ways and many of these services were of a confidential and honourable nature. In 1762, when John Pybus, the Englishman travelled for 13 days from Trincomalee to Ganoruwa, the authorised representative of the king who attended on Pybus was a Muslim. Pybus does not mention the name of the officer in attendance, but it has been reported to the Dutch in Colombo (who were very vigilant about this mission), that the son of Maula Mohandiram, a Muslim was frequently seen in the company of the envoy. The king was so pleased with his performance that the son of Maula Mohandiram was showered with gifts of gold.³⁹ Further, a promissory note stating that father and son owed the treasury a sum of 1500 and 2000 *pagodas* was torn up and the debt liquidated.⁴⁰ We learn from the same source that Uduma Lebbe, son of Maula Mohandiram, was sent by the Kandyan king to Muhammed Ali, Nawab of the Carnatic, so as to negotiate for British help through him.⁴¹ The Nawab was rather sceptical and asked him why the king of Kandy did not send a Sinhala minister on such an important mission and went to the extent of sending an emissary to the Kandyan court to check the bonafides of Uduma Lebbe. On another occasion Maula Mohandiram himself was sent to Madras to enlist troops for the king in case tension increased between the King and the Dutch⁴². The King made use of his Muslims subjects to keep abreast of developments outside the kingdom, especially to find out the power politics in South India, as well as in the Company's territory. The Dutch

governor Jan Schreunder (1757-1762) complains that the Muslims are corrupting the king of Kandy and because of Muslim association the Kandyan court has become cunning and conversant with the Company's affairs.

A copper plate land grant dated 1765 found at the British Museum reveals the fact that Kirti Sri Rajasinha had sent his favourite Muslim physician, Gopala Mudaliyar to Pondicherry soliciting French assistance against the Dutch when the armies of the latter had occupied Kandy. The same document refers to an earlier mission when the same envoy was went to the Netherlands, showing the trust and confidence which the Kandyan kings placed on their Muslim subjects.⁴³

High ranking Muslims were selected for important foreign assignments because they had sea-faring habits, international links, linguistic ability⁴⁴ and according to Ryckloff van Goens⁴⁵ they were well equipped with "smooth talk", all of which were valuable attributes and made them particularly adept at diplomacy. It was seen that such ambassadorial duties had been traditionally assigned to Muslims by the Sinhala kings as far back as 1283 when Buwanakabahu I of Yapahuva (1272-1284) sent Al-haj Abu Uthman to the court of Egypt to negotiate direct trade connections.

It is interesting to note that there are certain Muslims families in the Kandyan areas having the family name Tanapati Mudiyanse. *Tanapati* means an ambassador and *Mudiyanse* refers to any high officer. Since many of the family names signify the office held originally by the family members, it is possible that these families had ancestors who served as ambassadors to the Kandyan kings.

Muslims and the royal bath

Another department of importance in the palace was the royal bath, which was a complicated affair, involving the services of nearly 500 families, who held land in return for service in the *ulpange* or royal bath-house. There is evidence

that Muslims were employed in this elaborate organisation through in what capacity we are not certain. It could be that they were given the privilege of washing His Majesty's feet, which was an honour bestowed on very high caste folk or the Muslims may have been remotely associated with the *ulpange* as suppliers of firewood to heat the bath.⁴⁶

Muslims in the royal kitchen

A much more responsible task within the palace in which Muslims were employed was the *multange* or royal kitchen.⁴⁷ Employment in the royal kitchen was restricted to extremely trustworthy and reliable servants, since the king's life depended on them. Quite apart from the fact that the Kandyan kings would have relished Muslim dishes, it is seen that the Muslims were considered very loyal supporters of the crown.

Muslims in the army

From the very beginning Muslims served in the armies of Sinhala kings and rose to very high military position. We have seen that they fought for the Sitavaka, Kotte and Kandyan kings. They formed a sizeable component of the Kandyan king's standing army throughout the existence of the kingdom. Due to financial constraints the Kandyan king's standing army was a small one, specially during the last days of the kingdom and it was noticed that in 1810, 400 Malabars, 250 Moormen and 200 Malays were being trained in kandy.⁴⁸ It is not uncommon for kings to have a non-Sinhala component in their army, so as to keep local conspiracies in check.

Muslim weavers, tailors and barbers

The Muslims were also skilled weavers. According to tradition the Muslims introduced the *Salagama* or weaver's caste to the island, and the Muslims seemed to have practised the skill in a significant way. In 1762, when John Pybus was travelling to Kandy, he spent his third night in a village called Pangurana which was 21 miles from Trincomalee. This was occupied by Muslims and Pybus noticed that in addition to

animal husbandry and agriculture, the Muslim peasants used to weave a “few pieces of ordinary cotton cloth for their own wear”. This village was situated within the province of Tamankaduva and the provincial governor or *disava* lived in Kandy. At the beginning of the 19th century the only weavers in Sri Lanka were the Muslims and Salagama people.⁴⁹ Tailoring was also another skill which they practised. Among the few Muslims who were given permission by the Dutch to temporarily settle in Colombo, were some tailors. Muslims tailors are common in Colombo even today. There is a reference to Muslim barbers or *panikki*.

Muslims as lapidaries

In the identification, processing and sale of gems the Muslims after generations of practice have acquired unrivalled skill. It was the lustre of gems that first attracted the Arabs to Sri Lanka and since then have maintained their interest in the trade. James Cordiner writes, “Among them are found merchants, money changers, jewelers, carpenter, tailors and all the useful types of mechanics. In cutting precious stones and making rings and other ornaments of gold, they are particularly neat handed and ingenious. From the simple power of their own invention they have produced many specimens of design workmanship, far from being inelegant. One of their favourite ornaments is a ring set completely round with samples of all the stones which the island produces.”⁵⁰ However, the actual mining of gems was done by the Sinhalese who sold them either privately or by public auction to the Muslims. In the pearl fisheries the divers were entirely Muslims both Sri Lankan and Indian: the Sinhalese playing no part in it.

Factors which favoured Sinhala – Muslim harmony

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that the Muslims in the Kandyan kingdom were a versatile group of people, who had mastered a variety of skills and served the country in many different ways. Davy noticed that they were “a stout active shrewd enterprising race.” This is an example of a long-standing stable situation where different ethnic groups that

make up society, have developed ways of co-existence without the need of blatantly obvious means of coercion; sociologists would term this a symbiotic relationship. The term symbiosis means a relation of mutual dependence between unlike and distinct groups within a community that works to their mutual advantage. In this type of situation, which is rare in modern industrial society, there was no scramble for the same scarce resources and no competition for unavailable jobs, but the diverse elements linked into a symbiotic network of interdependence based on their specialisation in the division of labour.

An example of this would be a community or region where one ethnic group concentrates on agriculture, another on manufacturing, the latter buying the former's produce with the earnings from sales within and outside the community or region. The mutual dependence that developed in Canada between the white fur traders on the one hand and Indian trappers and transporters on the other is shown as an example of perfect symbiosis. Whether or not such relations are exploitative is beside the point. If the people in the situation regard it as to their advantage, there is a consensus that stretches across ethnic barriers, as it happened in the Kandyen kingdom.

Muslim specialisation was mainly in trades in which the Kandyans, due to traditional values, and caste restrictions were not interested in pursuing. "The Cingalese discover no inclination for Trade or Navigation. Indeed, as they chiefly inhabit inland parts of the island, they are not much in the way of either..." On the other hand the Muslims took easily to both, as the Hollander remarks, "as a fish takes to water." The Kandyans, a settled and mainly agricultural people who considered the ownership of land the only prestigious form of wealth, found the Muslims useful and enterprising associates supplying various needs and performing diverse services which they themselves were traditionally reluctant to get involved in.

One of the important factors which contributed towards this harmonious relationship was that Islam did not come to Sri

Lanka as a conquering, proselytising force in the manner it came to India. Then as now they went about their business peacefully, maintaining cordial relations with all concerned and enjoying the favour and patronage of all and not forming a power group. When they moved into the interior of the country under Dutch and Portuguese pressure, they were welcomed by the Kandyan kings, who gave them land and encouraged them to marry Kandyan women. The attitude of the Kandyan kings towards Muslims, Tamils and Christians of every denomination, living within the realm was magnanimous, true to the ideals of Hindu-Buddhist monarchy. In Sinhala society, there was no social rejection of communion with foreigners, due no doubt to the egalitarianism and internationalism of their faith.

Another factor which contributed towards this harmonious relationship was the presence of a common adversary on the coast. At the beginning there was no clash of interests between the Arab trading communities and the indigenous population and hence there was little conflict. In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a trend towards the Sri Lankanisation of the Muslims and this was largely inspired by the European threat on the coast. The European occupation adversely affected, the king, nobles and people and was particularly detrimental to the interests of the Muslims. Hence the irritable presence of a common foe, which was a major threat, submerged any elements of discord and welded the various groups together. From the very inception the Kandyan kingdom was faced with this threat, in fact it emerged as a response to it, and this prevented a major rupture arising from the animosities within the society. George Simmel has shown how “unification by a more chronic than acute danger, by an always latent but never exploding conflict is the most effective where the problem is the lasting unification of somewhat divergent elements.”⁵¹

This long and close association between Sinhalese and Muslims continued till the British came and began their masterly manipulations of the diverse components of society. As in India, the Muslims became a potential weapon in their

hands, an ally who could be used to their advantage to undermine the power and influence of the King of Kandy. Soon after we see the consequence of the subtle policies. Then the commutation of services, monetisation of the economy, secularisation and modernisation of society led to competition where there was co-operation, and fissures began to appear on the hitherto smooth surface.

NOTES

1. Tennent, Volume 11, pp. 619-692.
2. M.I.C.H. Silver Jubilee Souvenir, 1944-69, p. 95.
3. Chetties are a South Indian trading community some of whom had settled in the island.
4. S. Arasaratnam. "The Kingdom of Kandy: Aspects of its external relations and commerce. 1658-1710, in *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies*, Volume III, No. 2, July – Dec. 1960, pp. 110-127.
5. Kottiyar (ancient Kotthasara of the *Mahavasa*) was the port of the minor province of Kottiyarama which had 64 villages. The *disave* of Kottiyarama resided in Kandy. He had delegated his power to three headmen who administrated the villages.
6. S.Arasaratnam, *ibid*. The officer was a *chetty*.
7. In 1762 the British Government of Madras despatched an envoy, Johan Pybus, to the Kandyan court with the object of entering into an alliance, see *The Pybus Embassy to Kandy*, 1762, transcribed with notes by R.Raven Hart, Ceylon, 1950.
8. Term used by the Dutch and British for South Indian Muslim traders.
9. *The Pybus Embassy*, p. 34.
10. *Ibid*.
11. *The Pybus Embassy*, p.36.
12. *Ibid*, p. 38.
13. *Ibid*, p.42.
14. *Ibid*, p.36.

15. *Ibid*, p.33-34.
16. *Mahavamsa*, XXIV.58.
17. John D'Oyly, *A Sketch of the Constitution of the Kandyan Kingdom*, Ceylon, 1929, pp.51-52.
18. *Diary of Mr. John D'Oyly*, J.R.A.S.C.B. Volume XXV No. 69, 1917, p. 133.
19. C.G. Urugoda, *A History of Medicine in Sri Lanka*, Colombo, 1987, pp. 15-16. Also see, *An Ethnological Survey of the Muslims of Sri Lanka*, Sir Razik Fareed Foundation Colombo.
20. S.M. Ahamed Udayar, "Sri Lanka Moor Physicians (Hakeems) to the Sinhala Kings", in *M.I.C.H. Souvenir*, IV 1997-82, pp. 171-174.
21. *Ibid*.
22. *U.H.C.* Volume I, Part I, p.625.
23. *M.I.C.H. Souvenir* IV., p. 171.
24. H.C.P. Bell, *Report on the Kegalle District of the Province, of Sabaragamuwa* Ceylon Sessional Paper XIX of 1892, p. 99.
25. *Ibid*.
26. *Ibid*, p. 100.
27. *Lawries Gazetteer* p. 943.
28. Relacao que O Padre propozite de Congregacao de Oratorio de Goa Fez do estado prezente de missao de Ceylao. Scrittura Riferite Congressi indie Orientali. Volume 40.
29. For detail see L.S. Dewaraja. P. 109.

30. H.C.P.Bell. *Report on the Kegalle District*. pp. 99-101.
31. For details of the plot see L.S.Dewaraja.pp. 1119-127.
32. *Lawries Gazetteer*. P. 134.
33. *Glimpses from the past of the Moors of Sri Lanka*.
Colombo 1976 by A.I.L.Marikkar, A.L.M. Lafir and
A.H.Macan Markar. P 195.
34. SLNA 1/254/86 and 266.
35. Despatch to Secretary of State dated 3 February 1827
appearing in the *Transactions of the R.A.S. of G.B. and
Ireland*. Volume I,p537. Also see Souvenir of the
M.I.C.H. 1965.p.55.
36. *M.I.C.H. Souvenir* IV. 1977-82, p 172.
37. *M.I.C.H. Souvenir* IV. 1944-1965, p 29.
38. H.C.P. Bell, *Report on the Kegalle District*. P.100.
39. *Secret Minutes of the Dutch Political Council, 1762*,
edited and translated by J.H.O. Paulusz, Colombo
1954, p.121.
40. *Ibid*.
41. *Ibid*, p. 121. The Nawab of the Carnatic was an ally of
the British.
42. *Ibid*, p. 68.
43. British Museum or 6606 (168).
44. Rev. James Cordiner says that the Muslims of Ceylon
spoke Sinhala, Tamil and Portuguese.
45. *Memoirs of Ryckloff Van Goens 1663-1675*, 1937, p.
18.

46. *Lawrie's Gazetteer*, p. 561.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *D' Oly's Diary*, p. 47.
49. A Bertolacci, *A view of Agricultural, Commercial and Financial interests of Ceylon*, London 1817, p.43.
50. Rev. James Cordiner, *A Description of Ceylon*. Also see Ameer Ali "Muslims participation in the export sector of Sri Lanka 1800-1815" in M.A.M.Shukri (Ed.) *Muslims of Sri Lanka*.
51. George Simmel, *Conflict and the Web Group of Affiliations* Illinois, 1955, p. 106.

VI. A HUNDRED YEARS OF BRITISH RULE

1815-1915

After a century of British rule the good relationship that had prevailed over a thousand years deteriorated into one of competition, suspicion and ill will, this was the result of the policy of divide and rule and communal politics which the British initiated from 1796 onwards. They tried to win over various groups like the Sinhala aristocrats and even the Buddhist Sangha in the maritime provinces so as to wean them away from their attachment to the king of Kandy. As in India the Muslims became a powerful weapon in the hands of the British; an ally who could be used to their advantage to undermine the power and influence of the king of Kandy. Governor Frederick North's Proclamation of 1799 preserving the laws applicable to the Muslims and the code of Mohammedan law effected in 1806, was an attempt to convince the Muslims of their separate identity. Even the abolition of the poll tax on Muslims imposed by the Dutch, which Governor North described as "an oppressive and disgraceful tax on an industrious race" was motivated not by purely humanitarian considerations. The same policy of divide and rule was applied vigorously in India when Lord Morley emphasised the deep rooted differences between Hindus and Muslims. The introduction of separate electorates for the Muslims in 1909 was a device adopted by the Viceroy Minto to win over the Muslims and set them against the Congress movement. It was nothing less than pushing back 62 million Muslims from joining the ranks of the seditious opposition.

In Sri Lanka too, British policy had the desired consequences. As long as the Sinhala monarchy lasted, the Muslims remained its staunch allies, but after the British took over in 1815, the Muslims partly because of British inducements tended to throw in their lot with the latter. This was in contrast to their previous attitude toward foreign powers. The reason was presumably that this foreign power was completely victorious and in full command and hence there was no option. During the great uprising of 1818 against British rule

the Muslims as a body remained loyal to the Raj. In Uva and Vellassa which were hot beds of rebellion, the Muslims who were thriving and sizeable community remained staunch supporters. "The Moormen are so numerous and so entirely our own than I do not think a detachment of soldiers necessary in this country", wrote Major Hardy.¹ The Muslims proved very useful to the British supplying pack oxen to transport provisions from the maritime provinces. Their loyalty was immediately rewarded by the following proclamation of 2nd March 1881.²

"Whereas the British government has on various occasions experienced the fidelity of the Moormen resident in these Provinces, we, taking the area into our serious consideration, and being desirous to mark to them that we duly estimate this attachment, do hereby declare and enact, that from and after the publication of this Our Proclamation in the several Districts of the Kandyan Provinces it shall not be lawful for any Kandyan Chief to exercise any jurisdiction whatever over the Moormen of this country; and that the Civil and Criminal justice shall in future, in all cases where a Moorman is a party, be impartially administered to them by British Officials, duly, in manner that shall hereafter be arranged and that the Mohandirams over the several Madige Departments, shall in future receive their appointments direct from the principal accredited Agent of the British Government in Kandy.

And we do hereby further promise that any Moorman who may suffer in his person, or, property by his adherence to the British Government, shall receive the fullest compensation as the nature of the injury will admit of.

We trust that the Moormen will duly appreciate the benefits herein granted and held at them, and they will earnestly and zealously aid and assist in putting down the present daring Rebellion; and we order them on their allegiance, and at their peril, to refrain from joining the persons now traitorously in arms against His Majesty the King of Great Britain and to oppose them by all means in their power."

Given at Kandy in the said Island of Ceylon on this 2nd day of March 1818.

By His Excellency's Command

Sgd. George Lusignan

Secretary Kandyan Provinces.

The Muslims it was seen had their own headmen but were under the authority of the *disava* of the province. From time immemorial the Muslims like the Sinhala villagers had paid their dues to the *disava* and were under his jurisdiction. With the patronage shown by the British, the Muslims solicited a Muhandiram from among their people. The Governor, Sir Robert Brownrigg granted the request and appointed an influential Muslim to the post. The Muslims not only escaped paying the taxes to the *disava* but could also repudiate his authority. The chiefs and Sinhala people were enraged with the new appointee who was given a post hitherto held only by certain aristocratic families. The incident shows that the manipulations of the rulers were imperceptibly creating a rift among the people who had hitherto lived peacefully.³

The proclamation had a disruptive effect on Sinhala-Muslim relations. All the Muslims in Kandyan territory were excluded from the executive and judicial jurisdiction of the Kandyan chiefs and all cases which involved Muslims were henceforth tried by British officials only. By promising the fullest compensation to any Muslim who has suffered any loss due to his loyalty to the Crown, the British Government ensured that the Muslims would henceforth look up to the new rulers as their saviours and at the same time disturbed the traditional interdependence that prevailed between the two communities.

There were other factors which were favourable to the Muslims from the beginning of British rule. From the 1820s the plantation industry opened new avenues of employment and economic advancement and these opportunities were seized by the enterprising Muslims and certain low country Sinhalese as

well. The Muslims did not take to cash crop plantations in a big way nor did they enter the professions of government service: but they accumulated capital through trade and urban property.

The servicing of plantations, transport, the traditional gem trade, wholesale and retail trading were the chief areas that the Muslims explored and soon some Muslims of the Western Province mainly, became a visibly prosperous community with a few families rising to national elite status. The book entitled, *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon*⁴ enumerates business men who rose to wealth and pre-eminence in society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Among them are men like N.D.H. Abdul Gaffoor dealer in precious stones and also manufacture of gold and silver jewelry. His shop in Colombo was one of the main tourist attractions in the city and his business concerns were found in London and Cairo. He was specially privileged to exhibit his priceless collection of stones to visiting British royalty.

The oldest jewelry business in the island established in Galle by O.L.M. Macan was later shifted to the premises of the Grand Oriental Hotel in Colombo. He acquired valuable gems from the chief mining areas and processed them for export to the European market. His shop in Colombo was internationally renowned and patronised by British royalty and nobility.

Muslim entrepreneurs successfully ventured into other pastures and some of them from small beginnings rose to fame in their respective enterprises, very often with connections in other Asian cities. A.S. Idroos who started life as a humble tailor in the vicinity of Galle Face became the premier tailor and outfitter attached to the Galle Face Hotel and supplier of military uniforms as well. His agents went aboard all ships which called at the Colombo Harbour, obtaining orders from customers among whom were the nobility of many nations. Janoo Hassan who started his business in Colombo in 1878 became the largest importer of rice and gram and exporter of coconut oil, cardamoms, tea and areca nuts. Ahamedbhoy Habibhoy head of the Sunni Khoja community from Bombay became the owner of the Spinning and Weaving Mills in

Wellawatta. S.L. Naina Marikkar was the owner of the Victory Silk Store a well known textile business house in Colombo. Gulam Hassen Shaikhtyebh who came to Colombo in 1860 started a mill to produce coconut and poonac (cattle food produced from coconut) employing 300 labourers.

While some of these successful Muslim business magnates were of Sri Lankan origin, others were recent migrants from India specially from the Kathiawar – Gujarat area. True to Islamic tradition many of them were liberal supporters of schools and charities thus assisting in the upliftment of the poorer sections of the community which even at this time lacked enlightened leadership and organisational skills.

Side by side with the economic and social changes there was another movement which heightened the self awareness of the different religious groups in the island. In the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, cultural revivalist movements emerged as a reaction to the dominance of Christianity which was associated with Western imperialism and was considered as a threat to indigenous religions. The Buddhist and Hindu revivals under two charismatic leaders Anagarika Dharmapala and Arumugam Navalar surfaced in many ways, one of which was the Buddhist Temperance Movement. These movements, however, were not without political undertones and the government viewed them with suspicion.

The awakening among the Buddhists and Hindus shook the Muslims from their slumber, but they were in need of a leader around whom they could rally. Just at this juncture, in January 1883, Orabi Pasha, an exiled Egyptian arrived and nerved the Muslim Community to action. The arrival of Orabi Pasha had in some ways the same impact on the Muslims as the coming of Colonel Olcott, the American theosophist, had on the Buddhists of this country. Orabi infused the Muslims with a sense of dignity and self respect and encouraged them to take to modern education. Muslim parents were reluctant to send their children to Christian schools for fear that their Islamic values

will be eroded; hence they lagged behind the other communities as far as modern English education was concerned. This initial focus therefore of the Muslim revivalist movement, was education. In this effort the charisma of Orabi Pasha, the energy and organising ability of Siddi Lebbe a lawyer from Kandy and the wealth of Wapche Marikkar a philanthropist combined to give birth to the Boy's School which later flourished as Zahira College, was established to impart modern education in a Muslim environment. The study of the Arabic language and the spread of Arabic knowledge were encouraged by the society.⁵

Closely related to the educational revival was the appearance of newspapers and journal specifically catering to the Muslim reading public. The first such was the Muslim Naisan published by Siddi Lebbe in Tamil. The first Muslim controlled paper in English was the Ceylon Muhammedan founded in 1900. The objectives of the newspapers were twofold; firstly to create a forum where themes of special interests to Muslims could be discussed such as Muslim marriages, education, history, saints, feasts etc. and secondly to publicise information about the activities of Muslims elsewhere such as the All India Muslim League, thus heightening their solidarity and strengthening emotional links with centres of Islamic power.

While the revivalist movement was intensifying Muslim self awareness, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan who was then serving in the legislature propounded the theory in 1888 that The Muslims of Sri Lanka came from South India and were actually converted Tamils.⁶ The Muslims denounced Ramanathan's contention and he was accused of trying to deny separate representation for the Muslims. It was argued that acculturation and admixture of blood did take place but that the first Muslims who came to Sri Lanka were Hashemites who left Arabia in the seventh century and hence they were an entity entirely separate from the Tamils. The controversy that followed Ramanathan's thesis not only enhanced the awareness of their ethnic roots but also encouraged the Muslims to renew their links with the centres of Islamic power in the Middle East in order to strengthen their claims to Arabic ancestry.

The Fez controversy of 1907 created another agitation which brought the Muslims together and taught them the benefit of organising themselves. The issue arose when the Chief Justice, Sir Charles Layard ordered M.C.Abdul Cader, the first Muslim advocate of Sri Lanka to remove his Fez cap when appearing in court. Abdul Cader refused to comply and withdrew from court since he considered it an affront to his religion and culture. A group of leading Muslims met the Chief Justice and submitted a petition to the Supreme Court; however, it was minuted that Abdul Cader should not appear in court wearing the Fez.

Since the issue at stake concerned the dignity and self-respect of Muslims, the leaders of the community organised themselves to an action programme and held 30 public meeting throughout the country. It was decided to appeal to King Edward VII to rescind the minute. However, before the extremes step was taken the Supreme Court made another minute authorising the wearing of the Fez. As could be expected the nation wide agitation strengthened Muslim solidarity.⁷

The changes that were introduced by the British in the name of modernisation and progress tended to widen the gulf between the ethnic groups living in the Island. The abolition of the service tenure system, the commutation of services, the introduction of the grain tax and the plantation of cash crops led to the disruption of the equilibrium of the Kandyan villages and also to landlessness among the peasantry. In one of the notorious cases of peasant eviction by the government in order to recover the tax of the 2889 peasant holdings which were sold in public auction, 1001 were bought up by the Kandyan residents, 1260 were brought by low country Sinhalese and Moors and the rest were brought up by the Crown.⁸ The destabilisation and consequent pauperisation of the peasantry and the monetisation of the economy led to the appearance of another class in the village and urban areas, namely, the money lenders and boutique keepers. It happened that a large number of them were coast Moors who came over from South India for purposes of trade. They controlled the island's trade to such an

extent that when the riots broke out and many of them went underground or fled to India, there was a severe shortage of essential foodstuffs.

The Sinhala Muslim riots of 1915 though sparked off by a religious provocation cannot be considered as a confrontation between Buddhism and Islam. As in the case of the anti – Muslim riots in Burma in 1938, the ostensible causes were religious; in Burma it was the re-publication of an anti-Buddhist book while in Sri Lanka it was the prolonged dispute over the traditional manner in which a major Buddhist festival was to be celebrated.⁹ In both cases these were not sufficient reasons to evoke such widespread violence without the background of powerful tensions, economic political and social. In Rangoon as well as in most Burma's towns and villages the traders and shopkeepers were almost always Indians and mainly Muslims, who migrated after British occupation. Commercial rivalry and other social problems such as inter-marriage engendered a hatred of the Indian Muslims, but when violence erupted all Muslims, Indian & Burmese became hapless victims of the rioting mobs.

In Sri Lanka from the end of the nineteenth century the export trade and the large retail trade was in the hands of British Borahs, Sindhis, Parsis, Chettiers and Muslims. The animosity of the small retail Sinhala traders against this foreign domination of the island's trade was directed mainly against the Coast Moors who had established their little shops, or boutiques, not only in the suburbs but also in the remote villages where they came in contact with the poorer sections of Sinhala society. The Coast Moors unlike the Ceylon Moors had no permanent interest in the country, but sojourned for a year or two for purposes of trade and periodically returned to India with their savings. They did not bring their families nor did they intermarry with the other Muslim communities of Sri Lanka. The Coast Moors have been accused of exploiting the poor by readily extending credit and selling at higher prices. It was reported to the Agricultural Banks Committee of 1910 that the peasant is often tempted with small loans at a time of distress and if the defaults he is ousted from his ancestral lands

to which he is traditionally bound, to “become a vagabond and a criminal”. In one instance reported to the Committee a Moor acquired land worth 2000 rupees for two bushels of paddy worth three rupees. The hardships of the poor were aggravated when the war broke out resulting in a shortage of essential commodities and rise in prices. The Coast Moor was again accused of Profiteering. The eye witness account of Armand de Souza, a Goanese who had made Sri Lanka his home is evidence of how the Coast Moor focused on himself popular wrath, which after the outbreak of the riots was extended to the rest of the Muslim population.¹⁰

It is against this background that one has to view the communal outbreak of 1915. The Buddhist revival and the Temperance Movement associated with it had gathered momentum and popularity. This had its parallel in the Hindu revivalist movement in Jaffna and the resultant focus on Tamil culture. This was a time of national awakening in the land when the various ethnic groups became aware and conscious of their heritage. Understandably Muslim self-consciousness and solidarity was likewise strengthened. The year 1915 was the hundredth anniversary of the fall of Kandy, engendering a nostalgic sentiment among the Sinhalese. This was comparable to the year 1857 in India which marked the hundredth anniversary of the battle of Plassey and stirred Muslim sentiment and led to the sepoy mutiny.

For some years a dispute had been brewing between the Buddhists and the Coast Moors regarding the silencing of drums as the Asala procession in Gampola passed a mosque built thirty years before.¹¹ The Ceylon Moors had their own mosque on the same route, known as the Meccan Sohonge a historic edifice built in the time of the Kandyan Kings. The votaries of this mosque went to the extent of obtaining from holding their service on the day of the Asala procession lest they disturb the Buddhist rite. Unlike the indigenous Muslim community who had for centuries lived with the Sinhalese, tolerating and even participating in their religious observances, the Coast Moors were insensitive to the customs of the local populace.¹² This resulted in ahead on collision between the

Sinhalese and the Muslims in Kandy on 29 May 1915, during the celebration connected with Vesak the birth anniversary of the Buddha, The situation was grossly mishandled by the British administration.

The trouble in Kandy was not very serious; but the rumour-mongers, looters and rowdies were active and the violence quickly spread. It was rumoured that the police were conniving with the Moors. An impartial contemporary observer, Ponnambalam Ramanathan writes, "In a state of passion and panic among the Sinhalese, and the irresolution and inactivity of the local authorities, the rowdies, gamblers, thieves and robbers of each village saw a rare opportunity for their own aggrandisement. They emphasised the stories of desecration and disruption of the religious procession of the Dalada Maligawa, of the rape & mutilation of Sinhalese women, and of the desire of the British Government not to arrest or punish the opponents of the Muhammadans, as it was at war with Turkey. With lightning rapidity all these tales were carried from village to village, and thus arose a tremendous ferment in the country, which manifested itself as an anti-Muhammedan riots."¹³

The British authorities in Sri Lanka saw in the riots a national conspiracy against British rule and even suspected a sinister German involvement. Their particular concern was that the riots coincided with the first landing of the British expeditionary forces in April 1915 in Gallipoli in Turkey and the British fearing Muslim uprising in support of Turkey which was technically the seat of the Caliph the head of Islam, were anxious not to inflame Muslim sentiment. Due to these fears the British authorities under a Governor Robert Chalmers who was himself unstrung with grief over the loss of his two sons in Flanders around that time, took panic and resorted to draconian measures to suppress the rioters and many Sinhalese national leaders were detained and several innocent lives were lost. As result of these harsh measures the Sinhalese leaders lost all confidence in the British, thus strengthening the national movement, while the hostility towards the Moors, who were the victims, was forgotten. The Moors, however, continued their traditional policy of loyalty to the British Crown. The anti-

Muslim riots of 1915 were the first of its kind in Sri Lanka and although there had been periods of tension and stress, no incidents of such intensity have occurred since and there is no reason to think that they will in the future or that the traditional good relations which have prevailed for over a thousand years will not continue.

Looking back on these thousand years, one sees the unfolding of an epic story a kind of saga in which a few intrepid traders became over the centuries substantial communities, which played a decisive role in the evolution of the island's history to become in modern time one of its cornerstones. It is also a romantic story, echoes of which still remain, as when in the defiles of our mountain country or in its rural hinterland one can still see the *tavalam* carts plying, the tinkling of their bells evocative of times far off like the haunting tinkling bells of Borodin's Steppes of Central Asia, evoking images of the timeless caravans of the past.

NOTES

1. Quoted by Colvin R. de Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation*, Colombo, 1953, Vol. I, p.176.
2. *Ceylon Government Gazette*. 1818.
3. Colvin R. de Silva, p. 177.
4. *Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon* (ed.) Arnold Wright, Great Britain, 1907.
5. For details see, Vijaya Samaraweera, "The Muslim Revivalist Movement 1880-1915". In Michael Roberts (ed.) *Collective Identities Nationalisms and Protests in Modern Sri Lanka*. 1979, pp. 243-72.
6. P. Ramanathan, "The Ethnology of the Ceylon Moors" in JRASCB, Vol. X, No. 36, 1888, pp 234-262.
7. For details see, *An Ethnological Survey of the Muslims of Sri Lanka*, Sir Razik Fareed Foundation, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1986, pp. 99-101.
8. *Sessional Paper XXIX* of 1889.
9. Moshe Yegar, *Muslims in Burma*, p. 31. ff.
10. Armand de Souza, *Hundred Days in Ceylon under Martial Law* 1919, pp.8, 9 and 10.
11. De Souza, p. 16.
12. Ponnambalam Ramanathan, *Riots and Martial Law in Ceylon* 1915, London, p.2.
13. Ramanathan, p. 16-17.

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